OVERCOMING NIHILISM:

A PASSAGE BETWEEN LUCE IRIGARAY AND NISHITANI KEIJI

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a hermeneutical dialogue between Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji. The main aim of the thesis is to creatively weave together their key thoughts of sexuate difference and *śūnyatā*. I do this by juxtaposing key points in their philosophical oeuvres, thereby developing my own position which includes the insight of sexuate difference within the insight of *śūnyatā*.

The philosophical position I come to is one that satisfies and strengthens both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji's requirements for overcoming nihilism, while at the same time, taking further each of their respective relational self-understandings. I argue that a relational self-understanding is dependent on bodily practices and the need to understand sexuate human being as integrated with nature. The philosophical problem of non-duality is examined with respect to sexuate difference, and I propose a non-dual position based on the insight of *śūnyatā* that still includes sexuate difference as a fundamental relational difference. Finally, interpersonal relationships are re-examined from an integrated position of the human being, as a living breathing body who is always sexuate, while at the same time, being always on the field of *śūnyatā*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This thesis is entirely the work of the author and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Luce Irigaray

BEW 2002. *between east and west*. Trans. S. Pluhácek. New York: Columbia.

BMH 2010. "Between myth and history: the tragedy of Antigone" in *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern philosophy and criticism*. eds. S. E. Wilmer and A. Zukauskaite. Oxford: OUP, 197-211.

BSW 2013. *In the beginning she was*. London: Bloomsbury.

BT 2002. "Being Two, How many eyes have we?" in *Paragraph* Trans. L. Irigaray et. al., 25: 3, 143-151.

CD 2002. "Why Cultivate difference?" in *Paragraph* Trans. L. Irigaray et. al., 25: 3, 143-151, 79-90.

CN 2008. *Conversations* Trans. S. Pluhácek. London: Continuum.

DBT 2000. *Democracry begins between two*. Trans. K. Anderson. London: Athlone Press.

ED 1993. *An ethics of sexual difference*. Trans. C. Burke and G.C. Gill. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

EIC 1996. "The eternal irony of the community" in *Feminist interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel*. ed. P. Jagentowicz. PA: Pennsylvania Univerisity Press. 45-58.

EW 1994. “Equal to whom?” in *The essential difference,* eds. N. Schor and E. Weed, 63-81. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

ILTY 1996. *I love to you: sketch of a possible felicity in history*. Trans. A. Martin. London: Routledge.

JLI 1995. “Je-Luce Irigaray”: A meeting with Luce Irigaray”, ed. Hirsch, E. and Olson, G.A. *Hypatia*, 10.2: 93–114.

JTN 1993. *Je, tous, nous: towards a culture of sexual difference.* Trans. A. Martin. London: Routledge.

KW 2004. *Key Writings*. Trans. G. Shwab. New York: Continuum.

SG 1993. *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. G.C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press.

SP 1985. *Speculum of the other woman.* Trans. G.C. Gill. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

SW 2008. *Sharing the world*. London: Continuum.

TBB 2017. *To be born*. Cham: Palgrave.

TBT 2000. *to be two* Trans. M. Cocito-Monoc. London: Continuum.

TD 1994. *Thinking the difference: for a peaceful revolution*. Trans. K. Montin. London: Athlone Press.

TS 1985. *This sex which is not one.* Trans. C. Porter with C. Burke. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

TVB 2016. *Through Vegetal Being: Two philosophical perspectives*. (with M. Marder) New York: Columbia.

Works by Nishitani Keiji

BVD 1991. "A Buddhist voice in the demythologizing debate" in *The Eastern Buddhist. Trans. R.F. Szippl 24:1. 1-27.*

CF 1995. "The Japanese Art of Arranged Flowers" in *World Philosophy: A Text with Readings* eds. R. C. Solomon and K. M. Higgins. Trans. Jeff Shore. New York: McGraw Hill.

EE 1989. "Encounter with emptiness" in *The religious philosophy of Nishitani Keiji*. ed. T. Unno. Fremont: Asian Humanities Press.

ENR 1985 "Encountering No-Religion" in *Zen Buddhism today,* Trans. L. Knaul. 3: 141-144.

IT 1969. 'The I-Thou relation in Zen Buddhism' in *The Eastern Buddhist* Trans. N.A. Waddell. 2. 71-87.

NK 1991. *Nishida Kitarō*. Trans. D. S. Clarke. Berkeley, University of California Press.

OB 2006. *On Buddhism*. Trans. S. Yamamoto and R. E. Carter. New York: State University of New York Press.

ON 2005. "On Nature" in *Confluences: Studies from East to West in Honor of V. H. Viglielmo*. Trans. Parkes, G. ed. Ochner, Nobuko and Ridgeway, W. Honolulu; UHP.

PM 1959 "The problem of myth" in *Religious studies in Japan*. Tokyo: Maruzen, 50-61.

RN 1983. *Religion and Nothingness*. Trans. By J. Van Bragt. London: University of California Press Ltd.

RPEB 1990. "Religious philosophical existence in Buddhism" in *The Eastern Buddhist*, Trans. P. Shepherd. 2, 1-17.

RTA 1987 "Reflections on two addresses by Martin Heidegger" in *Heidegger and Asian Thought* ed. Graham Parkes. Hawaii: University of Hawaii press.145-154.

SN 1990. *The Self overcoming of nihilism*. Trans. By G. Parkes and S. Aihara. Albany: State University of New York Press.

SP 1986 "The starting point of my philosophy" in *FAS society journal*. Trans. J. Shore. Autumn: 24 -29.

STZ 1984 "The standpoint of Zen" in *The Eastern Buddhist*. Trans. J.C. Maraldo. 1-26.

TW 1986 "Three Worlds – No Dharma: Where to seek the mind?" in *Zen Buddhism today*. 4: 119-125.

Works by Other Authors

RR 1996. Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan. Trans. S. Yamamoto and R.E. Carter. Albany: State University of New York Press.

TM 2004. Gadamer H.G. *Truth and Method* London: Bloomsbury.

1

INTRODUCTION, MOTIVATION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. Introduction

The main aim of the thesis is to creatively weave together Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji's creative philosophies of sexuate difference and *śūnyatā*. The method I use to do this is one of juxtaposition. This involves a close hermeneutical reading within the parameters of the emerging discipline of feminist comparative philosophy. For this to be possible, I have chosen points of intersection in Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray's philosophies and have juxtaposed them freely in the structural order which best suited the ideas being put forward. I have also, often quoted at length, so that their positions may speak for themselves.

After introducing each philosopher, I establish the common ground of nihilism at the root of their philosophical journeys. I then go on to show their creative ways of overcoming nihilism – through breathing practices and a reintegration of the body with nature, through their re-envisioning of aesthetic and contemplative practices, and through their reading of myths, such as the

Buddha and the Virgin Mary. Throughout this creative overcoming I show how both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray's philosophies can supplement each other. Moreover, by juxtaposing key points in their philosophical oeuvres, I develop my own position which includes the insight of sexuate difference within the insight of *śūnyatā*. By juxtaposing Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray, I demonstrate a third position: that the problem of nihilism is our problem (I-he and I-she) and that we have the potential for a liberated existence within *śūnyatā* together, as non-she and non-he.

Throughout this thesis I argue that the formation of the self must go from the alienated subject, to the sexuate subject, to the pure subject (which transdecends while still including the sexuate) as stages of development in the awareness of a liberated subject who is no longer alienated from themselves. Liberation from alienation and nihilism, is brought about when *śūnyatā* includes the sexuate difference of men and women, understandable as two subjects who are different, but who on the non-dual field of *śūnyatā* are absolutely intertwined with each other. Philosophy, with the inclusion of Eastern practices, thereby becomes a vehicle for the unfolding of awareness of both I-he and I-she (as two subjects who are different) and then proceeds to a self-understanding of two pure selves as non-he and non-she who are always sexuately two, and always intimately related, as understood on the field of *śūnyatā*.

1.2. Motivation

The reasons behind this philosophical comparison are firstly, accidental, and secondly, as I later came to appreciate, necessary. In accidently reading these two very different philosophers side-by-side, I saw a number of similarities in their orientations which related directly to each other as well as to my own experiences.[1] The main points which bring us together are: valuing the existential standpoint, the experience of living between traditions and the position that refuses to separate thought and practice but remains between them. After several years of reading Western philosophy I had finally stumbled across two relatively contemporary philosophers who saw themselves as occupying a place which they call "between" East and West and doing so in a very personal and creative manner.[2] A place that I too found myself occupying on returning to England after several years of traveling in Asia and Europe, where I had been studying diverse practices and systems of thought tied to those practices.[3]

Unlike the majority of philosophers Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji consider this between place as I do, to be a positive place for practice, transformation of ourselves, and our way of thinking; a place from where we

[1] Examining the coincidental in philosophy from different 'cultures' is itself a viable motivation and method of comparative philosophy, if only to see that those coincidences themselves are revealing about ourselves (Ivekovic, 2000).
[2] Both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji speak in terms of "East" and "West". I do not follow them in such a claim. These practices and world views clearly are not from a single origin which we might call the "East" or the "West". We shall discuss this later.
[3] I practice disciplines such as Yoga, Buddhist meditation, Traditional Thai massage and Aikido, alongside reading diverse Western philosophical texts, including texts on psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic systems of practice-thought.

might practice and think from perspectives as diverse as Yoga, Zen Buddhism, Psychoanalysis and Western philosophy simultaneously; a place from where we might develop supplemental philosophies which both rejuvenate the Western tradition of philosophy, shaking it from its self-imposed isolationism, and create a philosophy for the future based on our own unique personal positions and dialogue between them; a place from where this creative philosophical dialogue might create new practices, new models for subjectivity, new ethical paradigms, and therefore, an alternative global culture, which is not based on what I, and they, see as a predominantly nihilistic Western model.

After the initial personal intuition and recognition of coincidences in Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji, I soon realised that this work was not merely personal, although the personal owing to the form of inquiry cannot necessarily be excluded from it either. This work is in fact necessary owing to the wider implications of socio-cultural globalisation and the perceived threats of technology, the demise of religion, cultural relativism, sex/gender inequalities, all recognised by Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji as real problems (except the latter in the case of Nishitani Keiji.) This intuition is shared by a number of scholars in a relatively new discourse termed 'feminist comparative philosophy'; a discourse with a specific methodology which is inclusive of sex/gender and cultural diversity, with the aim of shifting the inherent biases within philosophy as taught in academia (and we can assume some other subjects) as well as the wider socio-political horizon, including self-transformation. It makes sense to examine feminist comparative philosophy here, to question its aims and

methods, and to thereby allow me to critically situate this thesis within the emerging field of feminist comparative scholarship.

1.3. Feminist comparative philosophy

'Feminist comparative philosophy' is a term recently coined by Jennifer Mcweeny and Ashby Butnor (2009; 2014) to mark out an emerging disciplinary field that lies between feminist theory and comparative philosophy. By recognising a basic similarity in feminist theory and comparative philosophical aims and methods, while at the same time acknowledging some important deficiencies within each field which can be highlighted and overcome through combining them, they attempt to establish a renewed discourse which is more inclusive and open, and ultimately, has more potential for the political (and spiritual) liberation of women (and men.) What I outline here draws on their concise elaborations of its aims and its methods, and thereby situates my own thesis within this emerging field.

For Mcweeny and Butnor, in general, and taking into consideration that both fields of scholarship are diverse and complex, a work of philosophy can be labelled *feminist* if it:

> ‘regards the voices and experiences of women as philosophically significant in a manner that is not sexist or discriminatory, but instead promotes the expression and flourishing of those who have been oppressed due to this social location’ (2014, 4)

While a work of philosophy can be called *comparative* if it:

> ‘regards the ideas of more than one disparate tradition of thought as philosophically significant in a manner that respects each tradition’s individual integrity and promotes its expression’ (2014, 4)

The aim of feminist comparative philosophy then is ‘the practice of integrating feminist and non-Western philosophical traditions in innovative ways, while still being mindful of the unique particularity of each, in order to envision and enact a more liberatory world’ (2014, 3). As they admit, what they are doing is nothing new, but rather a recognition of a ‘distinct kind of philosophical practice’ which is constituted by a ‘guiding methodology’ (2014, 4) already common to both disciplines.

This guiding methodology draws on the commonalities we sometimes find in the approaches of comparative philosophy and feminist theory, while

attempting to address the deficiencies in each discipline. The three main commonalities within their methodologies are:

1) They both treat diversity as a philosophical resource
2) They both recognise that a hermeneutic of openness and respect for difference are necessary for engaging with this diversity
3) They have both traditionally been critical of assumptions of objectivity, neutrality, and universalism in the wider discipline of philosophy

   (Butnor and Mcweeny, 2014, 9)

The primary difference between the two disciplines is that comparative philosophy works across traditions which are culturally diverse, whereas feminist theory focuses on sex/gender diversity. The problem is that, as Mcweeny and Butnor (2014, 5-6) rightly point out, there is a distinct lack of cross-over in the two focal points of each discipline.[4]

On the one hand, for all their sensitivity to cultural diversity and the benefits of understanding one's own prejudices through the creation of distance to one's own tradition by engaging with another, comparative philosophers do

[4] Although they note the lack of existing intentional interdisciplinary work between feminist theory and comparative philosophy, Butnor and Mcweeny also recognise a small amount of important existing scholarship dating back to the 1990's. See their very helpful 'Bibliography' in *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions (2014).*

not necessarily take into consideration women's voices, and tend to focus on philosophical comparisons between male figures from patriarchal cannons in their research and in the courses they teach. On the other hand, there has been a distinct lack of comparative philosophical engagement from female philosophers and feminist theorists – even though there has been ample criticism of white middle-class feminism in feminist theory, it has remained somewhat internal to the feminist discourse and has not made the leap to a fully-fledged feminist comparative philosophy. For them, it is this specifically philosophical engagement that differentiates feminist comparative philosophy and its methodology from the other disciplines which work across both cultural or traditional boundaries and the sex/gender dichotomy at the same time:

> 'what distinguishes feminist comparative philosophy from transnational/global/postcolonial feminist theories is that feminist comparative methodology engages an analysis of original and primary philosophical sources from the tradition[s] in question' (Butnor and Mcweeny 2009, 5)

The deficiencies found in both disciplines are to be addressed by the discipline of feminist comparative philosophy, with its specific methodology and focus on philosophical texts. However, Mcweeny and Butnor argue further, that if we were to bridge the gap between the two disciplines of feminist theory and comparative philosophy – including the positive sides of them both in a synthetic hermeneutics of feminist comparative philosophy – then the new

discipline would be highly advantageous to our aims of political and spiritual liberation:

> 'Our express goal in fostering such comparative, coalitional thinking is to cultivate liberation at the philosophical level by examining, recovering, and reweaving the very conceptual fabrics and patterns of thought that are operative in our cultures and traditions of origin' (Mcweeny and Butnor, 2014, 1)

This liberation from narrow and insular ways of perceiving the world around us, and the conceptual matrix of self-other-world-cosmos which we inherit and contribute to, is therefore challenged on a philosophical level through engaging with another tradition; while at the same time, the hierarchical, patriarchal practices of discrimination based on sex/gender difference are also challenged for the same limiting and insular frameworks which they perpetuate.

To summarise, what is being proposed is a methodology with two dynamics and a liberational aim:

> 'the idea that philosophical insight and the personal, intellectual transformations that it entails occur when a philosopher 1. Endeavours

to acknowledge and embody, rather than ignore and transcend, her own subjectivity, and 2. Makes genuine authentic contact with another philosophical perspective' (Butnor and Mcweeny, 2014, 12)

In short, we can say that feminist comparative philosophy is liberational in the sense of being simultaneously self-transformational and socio-culturally transformational. It is no wonder then that Asian philosophy is an ideal partner for dialogue with feminist theory, owing to its long-preserved traditions of self-exploration through bodily practices, meditation and contemplation. However, the heightened political consciousness raising found in feminist movements, through their sensitivity to sex/gender diversity is now included in the foreground, making these perhaps older traditions more politically and ethically aware, and results in a new discourse of feminist comparative philosophy. But as they state:

'Most importantly we wish to emphasize that feminist comparative methodology fosters the development of original, creative concepts and ideas that may not have emerged had the philosopher been thinking within the confines of one tradition only' (Butnor and Mcweeny, 2009, 5)

This thesis contributes to the emerging discourse of feminist comparative philosophy. The philosophical standpoint which emerges from the

dialogue which I construct here is between traditions and includes the insight of sexuate difference. Luce Irigaray's thought is already transgressing the borders of comparative philosophy and sex/gender diversity, which makes her work as a uniquely creative female philosopher, ideal for further juxtapositions. Nishitani Keiji's too is moving across the conceptual borders of different traditions, but he is limited in his appreciation of sex/gender diversity. By bringing the two together I follow McWeeny and Butnor's prescription by creating a position drawing on both of their strengths with the aim of establishing a model for both self-transformation and socio-cultural transformation (aims which they themselves also share).

However, as McWeeny and Butnor say themselves the feminist comparative method is nothing new, it is philosophical hermeneutics. The modern tradition of philosophical hermeneutics which originates with Martin Heidegger and is elaborated further by Hans-Georg Gadamer is part of the patriarchal tradition of western philosophy. However, this tradition's primary concerns are with the to and fro between text and reader, the transformation of the self through exposing our prejudices, engaging with historically different texts or in dialogue with another. What we have in feminist comparative philosophy is philosophical hermeneutics with a heightened awareness of sex/gender and cross-cultural diversity, and, a way of reading a text from a particular subjective position between those texts and places. The method McWeeny and Butnor suggest is, in its essentials, in-line with philosophical hermeneutics, and this tradition already has been engaged with by female

philosophers, feminists and cross-cultural philosophers. It is to this philosophical tradition that I now turn.

1.4. Philosophical hermeneutics

Nishitani Keiji, Luce Irigaray and Hans-Georg Gadamer are all greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger from whom the modern form of philosophical hermeneutics and its shared terminology originate. Although the juxtaposition of Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji could be explored through their relation to Martin Heidegger, here I have chosen to bring H. G. Gadamer into the dialogue, as his work takes Heidegger's more explicitly into the hermeneutic process of reading, dialogue and ethics, and his work has been more thoroughly engaged with by comparative and feminist philosophers. In this section we shall make a brief examination of philosophical hermeneutics and some of its essential terms. It is helpful for us to understand these terms, if any dialogue is to be possible between us (ourselves, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji and the Western philosophical tradition and the reader) within a shared language and framework of mutual understanding.

The tradition of hermeneutics is probably as old as the philosophical tradition itself, if not older. In its pre-modern sense, it was the rules for the correct interpretation of a text in Biblical hermeneutics (Madison, 1994, 290). A tradition is therefore preserved by a system of interpretation which

guarantees the right reading and meaning to emerge from the texts under examination. It is seen as objective. In the twentieth century, hermeneutics underwent a very significant change within the larger movement of phenomenology. And although some scholars continued a tradition of hermeneutics in its classical meaning – of interpreting a text according to certain rules – Martin Heidegger appropriated the meaning of this term for his own purposes, to be concerned with fundamental ontology: 'a properly philosophical elucidation or interpretation of the basic (ontological) structures of human understanding which is to say, human existence itself' (Madison 1994, 299).

At the root of this appropriation was the problem of dualism in philosophy, and the desire in phenomenology to overcome the diremption between the objective and the subjective (Madison 1994, 297-299). A division which, as we shall see, is crucial in both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray, who both continue this tradition of self-understanding in new directions, by reworking the subject-object divide in their own philosophy, and from their own ontological positions. In short, as we shall see, by two different versions of non-dualism. To summarise, we can say that philosophical hermeneutics was no longer a mode of knowing (objective interpretation) but was now a mode of being (an understanding of oneself in the world).

Whenever we face another person, a text, engage in dialogue, or simply go about our day, we are in a mode of self-understanding whereby ourselves and

things (the world) are mutually altered through that engagement, even if this is implicit and never recognised. What is most interesting is the fundamental structures of our existence, or more appropriately, our interpretation of the fundamental structures of our existence, completely condition our interpretations. They are in effect our fundamental prejudices which allow for all interpretation to be possible while conditioning that interpretation. Furthermore, this leads to the obvious conclusion – even though there can never be a conclusion, because meaning is infinite and transformation in the sense of self-understanding is unlimited, because we can never know anything completely – for both Gadamer and Ricouer, as Madison points out, that 'not only is understanding … a form of self-understanding, but all self-understanding is ultimately a matter of *self-transformation*' (1994: 317). The aim of philosophical hermeneutics, therefore, is one of self-transformation, which is in-line with the aim of feminist comparative philosoph. It is also the ultimate aim of philosophy for both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji.

At first glance an attempt to make a conversation between myself, the reader, and two such diverse philosophers as Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji might appear strange, I hope so. The idea of an encounter with the strange in order to draw out what we take to be familiar (all the while becoming familiar with the strange) is the practice of philosophical hermeneutics, which is 'based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness' (TM, 295) where neither the familiar nor the strange remain unaffected.[5] Hermeneutics is located in the 'play

[5] 'All understanding involves a process of mediation and dialogue between what is familiar and what is alien in which neither remains unaffected' (Malpas, 2014).

between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition' (TM, 295). Therefore, 'the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between' (TM, 295). The text here is taken to be an object which is situated historically distant from us. We ourselves belong to a tradition. The mediation between our tradition and the text which lies within its own tradition, and which we are interpreting, is the in-between space where the hermeneutic encounter can take place. Gadamer does not theorise this between space further, but it is crucial for his hermeneutics to be possible. And as we shall see, it is crucial for both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji who both claim to work in this "between". In short, a relational endeavour of self-understanding.

For Gadamer, 'the meaning of "belonging," – the element of tradition in our historical-hermeneutical activity – is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices' (TM, 295). Belonging and tradition are inseparable, and we might even say that they are the same thing. We belong to a tradition because we have shared or common prejudices which originate owing to our proximity to that tradition; that which is so familiar to us, that we don't even know it. They colour everything we see, but without them, we wouldn't be able to see. In *Truth and Method (1960)* Gadamer reclaims the term prejudice from its pejorative sense to give it a positive meaning and to make it a recognised necessary aspect of the practice of hermeneutics. We all have our prejudices, our fore-understandings, our pre-judgements and these are what enable us to make interpretations. And, at the same time, in the engagement itself our prejudices come to the fore, that which is familiar is revealed to us in

the hermeneutical dialogue with the strange. In fact, without this encounter with the strange our prejudice cannot be uncovered. It is only by opening ourselves to that which is other or different that we can uncover our prejudice, or raise it to the level of self-understanding (and therefore self-transformation) as Gadamer clearly states:

> 'It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation' (TM, 298)

More dramatically stated: 'Our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk' (TM, 298). Our shared prejudice therefore, make a purely subjective position impossible; and at the same time, make an objective position, a neutral position, one outside of history, also impossible. The method of understanding which avoids both subjectivism and objectivism is captured in the term "hermeneutic circle", as Gadamer states:

> 'The circle, then, is not formal in nature. It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter … Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves in as much as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition,

and hence further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a "methodological" circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding' (TM, 293)

We see clearly that what is at stake here is not the objective interpretation of a text, but rather the fundamental ontology of understanding itself. Moreover, we see emphatically why no pre-ordained methodology can be imposed on a dialogue between what is different or strange and with that which is familiar. It would be, in short, and as we shall discuss shortly, unethical.

Our "horizon" or our "situatedness" is therefore directly related to our tradition. We have a horizon which is imbedded or situated within a tradition and from here is where we understand, and which is as much a movement of self-understanding, as Weinsheimer and Marshall explain:

'For Gadamer "tradition" or "what is handed down from the past" confronts us as a task, as an effort of understanding we feel ourselves required to make because we recognize our limitations, even though no one compels us to do so. It precludes complacency, passivity, and self-satisfaction with what we securely possess; instead it requires active questioning and self-questioning' (TM, xvi)

Hermeneutical understanding, therefore, always takes place within history and from a specific position, which is shared with others, and from where we can become aware of our own horizon, which is from where we face the world with all our prejudice. This place is one of self-questioning, a practice as we shall see, this is fundamental to both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji.

The hermeneutical encounter then is a dynamic between self-understanding (ourselves and our shared tradition) and the understanding of what is foreign, strange or simply different to us (in this case a text which is historically distant to us and from or within another tradition.) By interpreting a text which belongs to a tradition, and which constitutes that tradition as such, we are brought into the hermeneutic dynamic: we must enter the horizon of the text in order to understand it, this brings out our own prejudice for examination, showing us our own horizon; and without such a dynamic only a limited understanding of the text or ourselves, and our different or shared tradition, is possible (Malpas, 2014). It is, in the end, an activity of self-transformation, albeit one of textual and philosophical nature.

However, we must note here that Gadamer's work has a distinct ethical thrust. His hermeneutics is not limited to the interpretation of texts. In fact, we could argue that it is the ethical or practical philosophy which informs his hermeneutical approach to interpreting traditionary texts. It is precisely for this reason that we are interrogating it as a shared framework for the discussion to

take place between Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji. Any dialogue must be grounded in a basic framework which is ethical and therefore open to difference.

Central to Gadamer's work is the concept of dialogue and a dialogue (at least in written form) works according to minimal parameters at best, what we might call “checks and balances”. When reading *Truth and Method* the ethical dimension of his thought jumps out at us, for at times we are not sure anymore if he is speaking of interpreting a text or engaging in a dialogue with another (man or woman?) For Gadamer all texts refer back to ‘lived life and spoken language’ (Kearney, 2004, 176). We are the living other who faces the text and whom must bring it to life in and through the dynamic of our own self-understanding. I take this point very seriously. When dealing with a text we are not dealing with a set of dead words available for dissection. We are in fact speaking with and listening to the other. Our ability to bring the text to life, and to dialogue with it, is fundamental to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutical approach. It is a central aspect of philosophical hermeneutics (as he re-envisions it) and without this the ethical dimension it is easily lost.

Bringing texts to life, or speaking with the texts, and therefore, speaking with the philosophers themselves, is an essential part of this thesis. Even if I am engaging with the texts, I argue that we are in fact engaging with the speaker themselves, and that our job in interpreting the texts is precisely to bring to life the thought of the speaker who wrote them. Ultimately, they are thoughts in and of the world, not dead words or transcendent words. If they

remain dead words, that is in part my own failing to bring them back to life through an engaging discussion between themselves and ourselves. It might also be a sign of one of our own shared prejudices: to see the written word as dead or stale words, rather than making an effort to re-embody them, or creatively revive them.

When it comes to the practice of dialogue itself, somewhat later in life Gadamer reflects on the ethical inherency to his practice of philosophical hermeneutics. For him it always was an endeavour of practical philosophy or *phronēsis* with the other (Gadamer, 2003, 21), who is also the one who is strange or foreign to us:

> 'Precisely in our ethical relation to the other, it becomes clear to us how difficult it is to do justice to the demands of the other or even simply to become aware of them. The only way not to succumb to our finitude is to open ourselves to the other, to listen to the "thou" who stands before us' (Gadamer, 2003, 29)

Everything which has been said above, therefore, can in fact be referred to engaging in an ethical dialogue with another man (but perhaps not with a woman according to certain feminists, and Luce Irigaray as we shall see.) What this means is that the concepts of 'tradition', 'prejudice', 'the between' and 'horizon' are all in play when we meet with another living being, not only when

we interpret historically distant texts. Gadamer outlines three basic modes with which the dialogue with a text or another (I-Thou) can take. Here, in a brief account of Gadamer's threefold dialogue, we will see the slippage into dialogue with another, as opposed to the mere interpretation of a text.

Firstly, we can speak about another, that is, we can objectify them as an “it” according to a method, allowing us to calculate the response of others; secondly, we can speak for another, or take the place of the other as if we can know them better than themselves. If both sides do this then a struggle for domination ensues; or thirdly, we can be in a relationship of mutual listening and interchange, in other words, a dialogue of mutual recognition where both are open to the encounter and are themselves changed through it (TM, 352-355).

The first two examples of dialogue both deny the prejudicial character of self-understanding, and therefore deny the possibility of understanding the other or one's self further within a situated historical position. The third brings in the prejudicial character of all hermeneutical encounters and opens the possibility for mutual recognition and mutual further self-understanding within and through the situated dialogue. This is the risk we take. I repeat an earlier quote: ‘Our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk’ (TM, 298) As I said then, it is no surprise that when reading this section of *Truth and Method (1960)* one does in fact wonder if it isn't this ethical dialogical

relationship which has structured textual hermeneutics, rather than the other way around.

Finally then, it is also no surprise that Bernstein (1983) Dallymayr (1996) and Warnke (1987; 2002) have all claimed that Gadamer's understanding of dialogue has great potential for engagements in cross-cultural dialogue. It does have great merits, but we should not be too hasty to appropriate it wholesale, for it has also been criticised for its Eurocentrism (Jantzen 2003, 292), and conservatism (Warnke 1987, 134-139; Warnke 2002, 79-80) which leads to some reservations concerning any comparative philosophical dialogue. It has also been recently engaged with by several feminists, such as Wright (2003) and Jantzen (2003) who also consider it to have potential for a dialogue of mutual recognition between men and women. Although as Jantzen (2003, 303) points out, Gadamer himself never speaks of differences of race, culture, sex/gender, which means we should be cautious about the dialogical ethics he proposes, and not be too hasty to appropriate his hermeneutical approach without adapting it to the participants who take part in the actual dialogue. We should note that for the most part minor re-workings of Gadamer are suggested by both sets of scholars; irrespective of whether they are working on issues of cultural difference, or sexual difference or both. And as we have already reflected above hermeneutics, according to Butnor and Mcweeny, must include the above sensitivities to the two forms of diversity (sex/gender and cultural.)

The point is, that philosophical hermeneutics cannot be a hermeneutics of exclusion; but must instead be a hermeneutics of openness to diversity, through a positive inclusion of differences in traditions and sex/gender, by including other voices in the philosophical dialogue, as well as having a heightened awareness to the issues of discrimination, injustice and domination that can be found in both texts and lived experience. Finally then, we can posit that perhaps the most important point we can take from philosophical hermeneutics is its aim of the cultivation of a broad open horizon. Gadamer himself states in *Truth and Method*:

> 'The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth … A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, "to have a horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it.' (TM, 301)

There is one final point of Gadamer's thought which we should acknowledge: this openness of our horizon is in fact what he terms 'truth'. Truth is no longer objective or eternal; but is rather the open space where the encounter can take place. Here Gadamer is taking up Heidegger's reworking of the Greek concept *ἀλήθεια* (rendered in English as aletheia) usually translated as unconcealed, disclosed or truth. As Madison points out: 'what he [Gadamer]

means by "truth" tends to coincide with the notion of openness' (Madison 1994, 308), as Gadamer himself states:

> 'The Truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experience. … The dialectic of experience has its own fulfilment not in definitive knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself' (TM 319 cited in Madison 1994, 308)

What we have seen here is a very basic framework and aim from where to begin nuancing the creation of a dialogue between Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray, according to the perceived needs of the participants who take part in that dialogue. This is certainly not something Gadamer would reject:

> 'working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with *tradition*' (TM, 302)

Substitute *the other* or *the thou* for *tradition* and I think we have a clear way of working through a dialogue between Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray, which is flexible towards those partaking in the dialogue and the questions which are being discussed between them while recognizing and respecting both

of their positions. In short, by engaging on the third level of mutual recognition, openness and listening that Gadamer suggests, we have a framework for further self-understanding and mutual understanding between differences, and certainly in a philosophical dialogue such as the one I propose here.

Furthermore, we should note, that this 'acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition' might in fact require a limiting of this openness. This vast open horizon, as we shall see, something Nishitani Keiji pushes to its furthest limit with his standpoint of *śūnyatā*; while on the other hand, Luce Irigaray has her reservations about such open horizons, and instead prefers a hermeneutics of *naivete* which prioritizes sexuate difference. As we shall see, for Luce Irigaray, a woman might find the encounter with a predominantly masculine tradition requires delimiting of this openness of horizon by the concept of sexuate difference, in order to preserve and enable her own subjective position in the face of patriarchal and masculine prejudice. A radically open horizon as we find in Hans Georg Gadamer, or Nishitani Keiji, is not the most suitable for Luce Irigaray and her ethical vision, for it may accidentally or implicitly white wash the horizon, covering over some perspectives owing to its broad vast openness.

1.5. Juxtaposition and hermeneutics as a framework

In the close reading of texts, the terminology used, and the dialogical toing and froing between Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji, this thesis is firmly within the philosophical hermeneutical tradition and its approach to understanding, truth and dialogue as self-transformation. The method of philosophical hermeneutics, as we have seen, is an attempt not to have a fixed or pre-established method of inquiry. This is because each study and every dialogue is unique, and therefore, requires acquiring the right horizon of inquiry, or we might say, acquiring an enabling form appropriate for a dialogue to take place. We must approach each study and inquiry with the most open of horizons in order to lay bare our own prejudices; at the same time, this horizon might require limiting in order to create a dialogue across traditions which are informed by sexuate difference.

With this foregrounding of dialogue now in place, it is important to stress that the close hermeneutical reading of Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji is required for a juxtaposition of their thought between East and West. A close reading takes place through extensive quotations, allowing the philosophers to speak through the text, and for meaning to arise between them. This juxtaposition has value in as far as the effects or findings of that juxtaposition give new insight into our own lives, and in-line with the existential understanding of philosophical hermeneutics as transformational. The problems that Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji engage in, are to some extent shared, and in so far as we share in them, they are also problems for ourselves.

This is what gives meaning to the existential inquiry. In the sense of comparative philosophy however, the justification for the juxtaposition itself, stands or falls, on the findings of that inquiry. This is not therefore, a new kind of methodology, it is a joining together of hermeneutic, existential, feminist and comparative methods of inquiry. And, it is the result of this juxtaposition, the conjoining of sexuate difference and *śūnyatā*, and the possibility of two standpoints (a non-he and a non-she) being established on that field, and how viable or insightful that is for our own experience, justifies the approach taken in this thesis.

2

LIFE, DIALOGUE AND PHILOSOPHY

2.1. Introduction

In part one of this chapter I shall overview both philosopher's life and work. We begin with an analysis of their respective work according to their autobiographical understanding of themselves, which they both self-reflectively consider to be in three phases. This serves to give us a good foundational understanding of their written work, and the changes in focus that take place within it over the long duration of their philosophical careers.

In the second part of this chapter I explain Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray's "methods" of cross-cultural dialogue. Luce Irigaray as we shall see, attempts to foreground a hermeneutic of *naiveté*, which is in brief, a hermeneutical horizon that privileges sexuate difference in the cross-cultural encounter and all interpretation (Deutscher, 2002; 2003). Nishitani Keiji also finds himself uniquely between traditions. However, his hermeneutic of *śūnyatā* is a broad open horizon more in keeping with Gadamer's hermeneutics,

with no borders or conceptual limits likened to the open expanse of the sky (Davis, 2011, 2004, 2013; Ueda, 2011; Heisig, 2001). This as we shall see, is problematic for Luce Irigaray as it may eradicate the opening of sexuate difference within a hermeneutic of global philosophy.

In the third part of this chapter I introduce each philosopher's fundamental self-understanding. Here we will see the key philosophical concept that is the pivotal thought or hermeneutical lens through which they interpret the self, as well as create philosophy. We shall see that they both critique any notion of a fixed or separate ego, and they both consider the self to be relational in its fundamental essence. By introducing the fundamental self-understanding they become familiar to us from the beginning, and with each of their fundamental hermeneutical standpoints, we can foreground the dialogue between them. Dialogue, etymologically, is a speaking across (ety. *dia- legein*). For this to happen there must be a between, a place where this dialogue takes place. This thesis is the between place where Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji meet.

2.2.a. Luce Irigaray: A life in three acts

Luce Irigaray is probably the most important female philosopher living and working today. She was educated in Belgium and France where she received a doctorate in linguistics and a second doctorate in philosophy. She trained

under Jacque Lacan as a psychoanalyst and went on to have her own personal psychoanalytic practice for over forty years. These different strands, along with her engagement with Eastern traditions and the practice of yoga, have woven together throughout the course of her life resulting in a unique philosophy, which she calls sexuate difference.[6] To explain her unique philosophy Luce Irigaray uses a three-phase developmental model:

> 'the first, a critique, you might say, of the auto-mono-centrism of the western subject; the second, how to define a second subject; and the third phase, how to define a relationship, a philosophy, an ethic, a relationship between two different subjects' (JLI, 97)

In her first phase, she wants to show 'how a single subject, traditionally the masculine subject, had constructed and interpreted the world according to a single perspective' (JLI, 97). In her controversial first book *Speculum of the Other woman ([1974] 1985)* Luce Irigaray critiques this patriarchal tradition, from Plato through to Freudian (Lacanian) psychoanalysis. Because a woman is

[6] In her early works, Luce Irigaray uses the term sexual difference. However, from the mid-1990's she changes this to sexuate difference and sexuate identity. She changed from the use of sexual to sexuate for reasons of clarification, for her, sexual is easily misunderstood to mean something to do with sexual relations, sexuality, or sexual orientation. She clearly considers sexual choice a secondary parameter to sexuate identity and sexuate difference. (See her comments in JLI, 112) For her sexual choice is free, it has nothing to do with sexuate difference, or sexuate identity (Personal communication, June 2013). In this thesis the term sexual difference will not be used unless in directly quoting her earlier works, and my usage of the term will be the more recent sexuate, rather than the problematic sexual.

an object for man, defined by him and has no recognised subject position of her own, in her critique Luce Irigaray is forced to mimic the male voice of the masculine culture's tradition as found in the text. She mimics this male voice in a hysterical female manner, playing on the definition of woman as defined by men in a discipline such as psychoanalysis, which leads to a novel style and form of critique (See Jones 2011, 19; Grosz 1989, 132-139; Whitford 1991, 70-72).[7] It results in a work of cutting genius that takes on the entire Western philosophical tradition from Plato to Freud. At the same time, it results in her expulsion from the university and the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis in Paris.[8]

In her second early work, *This Sex which is not one ([1977] 1985)* Luce Irigaray further develops this first phase, building on her critique of the psychoanalytic and Western philosophical tradition; specifically, by taking up a Marxist informed critique of the phallo-centric consumerist-capitalist economy of male dominated society, masculine culture and its commodification of women as objects (Whitford 1991, 20-22). In short, in this early phase, the understanding of a subject according to the tradition of Western philosophy and

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[7] These stylistic considerations have been taken into account when presenting and juxtaposing Luce Irigaray with Nishitani Keiji. The two main points being: Firstly, it means that there are inherent problems when analysing her work if I begin to systematise it, analyse it or take a critical and reflective position; for that position is, according to her, inherently phallocratic, it is a position derived from this very history of the single male subject. Secondly, it means that by placing her alongside another diverse and complex thinker such as Nishitani Keiji, we must be extra careful not to assimilate her back into a patriarchal tradition of philosophy, even if this tradition is extended across conceptual limits usually referred to as East and West.

[8] See her dramatic self-understanding of this in *In the Beginning She was* (2013, 114-119).

the masculine culture which it underpins, is critiqued from the perspective of a woman who has no subject position of her own within that culture, i.e., paradoxically, an external perspective from within the masculine Western cultural tradition.

In the mid 1980's her work enters what she considers to be a more positive second phase. This is seen as the period from the publication of *An ethics of sexual difference ([1984] 1993)* onwards. This first step towards a constructive position for Luce Irigaray, had the aim of defining 'those meditations that could permit the existence of a feminine subjectivity – that is to say another subject' (JLI, 97). In this period, she takes up a more sympathetic dialogical form within her texts, which is still nevertheless stylistically innovative and idiosyncratic, as she takes up an affectionate and passionate mode of engagement with the history of philosophy (Lehtinen 2014, 193). Her critique of the male-centric history of philosophy continued, as she went on to engage with thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger in two separate and influential texts.[9] This phase therefore, began a more constructive and positive elaboration of a woman's subject position and perspective, while remaining more sympathetically in dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition.

[9] See, *Marine lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (Texas University Press, 1999)

This second phase must also be seen in close connection with the third phase of the 'between-two'. The development of a female subjectivity or female subject, as these terms are used interchangeably, is closely linked with a development of an irreducible sexuate difference, what she calls a 'between-two'. This for Luce Irigaray is an attempt to 'define a new model of possible relations between man and woman, without the submission of either one to the other' (JLI 96). This phase clearly emerges in the early 1990's and can best be seen in texts such as *i love to you ([1992] 1996)* and *to be two ([1994] 2000).*[10] This third phase showed an even greater focus on the poetic and the evocative, where her written work becomes a creative art of philosophy. Although she continues to explicitly and implicitly engage with the masculine Western philosophical tradition.

We can see that Luce Irigaray's work develops over her long career as a philosopher and a writer. Beginning with a damning critique of the psychoanalytic and Western philosophical tradition, she goes on to positively think through the implications of her critique for women as a different subject defined in her own right, before finally elaborating a creative and dynamic philosophy which operates between two different subjects. We have seen that she does not rest in a critical philosophical perspective, but instead goes on to elaborate a creative philosophy based on an ethics of sexuate difference between subjects who are not the same. With this in place, we can now juxtapose Nishitani Keiji's threefold autobiographical understanding of his work.

[10] Here she does not capitalize the initial letter of the title of her books.

2.2.b. Nishitani Keiji: A life in three acts

There are two principle autobiographical documents where Nishitani Keiji demarcates his oeuvre according to his own self-reflexive understanding. The first is the autobiographical essay 'The standpoint of my philosophy' published in 1963. The second is the message in absence to the symposium held in his honour, entitled 'Encounter with emptiness' published in 1984. These two short works together offer us a clear self-reflexive perspective on his fundamental philosophical orientation and its three phases. In 'The standpoint of my philosophy' Nishitani Keiji explains his development as follows:

> 'I myself turned to philosophy from out [of] … a pre-philosophical nihilism [nihility]. Therefore, the fundamental direction I followed was, first of all a philosophical development of the nihilistic standpoint itself. Secondly, it was a philosophical and critical inquiry into the problems of ethics and religion. And finally, the fundamental direction I followed was one of going through nihilism and finding a way to overcome it. These three threads were naturally entwined into one' (SP, 29)

In his youth and through his student days Nishitani Keiji experienced a great despair, something which he called a pre-philosophical nihilism: a loss of meaning to his very existence. This despair was pre-philosophical because it

included or necessitated for him a turn to a study of Western philosophy. In short, it is an existential inquiry. This included key figures of the European philosophical tradition (Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, to name just a few) under the guidance of his first teacher and the first modern Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945). From here, he followed his inquiry into religion and ethics (his middle phase) before finally overcoming nihilism by going through nihilism. This overcoming of nihilism being that which demarcates the middle to later period of his thought (a path which was foreseen in *The Self Overcoming of Nihilism* some fifteen years earlier.)

At the end of this same autobiographical piece 'The standpoint of my philosophy', we are told that the overcoming of nihilism was made possible by the realization of the Buddhist standpoint of *śūnyatā*. In fact, in the very first line of this short essay Nishitani Keiji states that he has 'come to understand things according to the Buddhist way of thinking' (SP, 24). It is this openly Buddhist way of thinking, along with his personal overcoming of his pre-philosophical despair, which combine to mark the final phase of his work. This is, moreover, the central turning point of his thought which takes place in 1963 (Ueda, 2001; Davis, 2006). It is from this mid-point onwards where we see a real commitment to a creative philosophical working out of a Zen philosophy (with increasing focus on aesthetics qualities including Zen literature, poetry and imagery) that will come to occupy Nishitani Keiji for the last third of his life (Heisig, 2001, 188).

For our purposes then, we can date his 'early period' from approximately 1930 to the mid-late 1940's (depending on whether it is marked by the end of the Second World War in Japan, or his publication of *The Self Overcoming of Nihilism* in 1949.) His 'middle period' is seen usually to begin from this point in the 1940's and runs up to the publication of *Religion and Nothingness* in 1962. The 'mature' or 'later' period is then considered to be from *Religion and Nothingness* onwards until his death in 1990.[11]

I consider this simple juxtaposition of each philosopher's autobiographical works to be hermeneutically interesting. The fact that at a certain point in their lives both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji look back and see the unfolding of their own philosophical development in three phases is quite revealing. Here I have shown that they both begin with an existential critique, before moving into a phase of positive exploration, before becoming more creative in style and content. Luce Irigaray is very conscious of this unfolding and considers the movement from the negative to the positive to the creative to be an intrinsic demand to the philosopher's life and practice. To remain in critique, is for her, a philosophical failure. According to her own standards of philosophical inquiry and development, therefore, Nishitani Keiji is a philosopher and a worthwhile partner for dialogue. It is to the Eastern

[11] The major consensus in the small amount of scholarship available in translation, is to divide Nishitani Keiji's work into three stages. (Some suggest a fourth late phase of Pure Land Buddhist influence (Van Bragt 2006; Carter, 2006; Hase, 1997b). Hase (1997), Horio (1997) and Mori (1997) are all tentatively in agreement about demarcating his oeuvre into three periods.

influences of both philosophers, especially in the realm of Eastern practices, which I now want to turn.

2.3.a. Luce Irigaray: between east/west, between text/practice

Alongside her work in psychoanalysis, linguistics and philosophy, Luce Irigaray has also been engaged with what she terms the East. This blending of yogic practices, and the broad studies which Luce Irigaray has undertaken over the last thirty or more years, has led her to begin to include in her writings from the early 1990's onwards, several oblique references to the Buddha, Yoga, Tantra and Krishnamurti, as well as references to South Asian and East Asian religious practices and myth.[12] However, it is not until her work *between east and west: from singularity to community* (2002) that her Eastern influences become explicit. Apart from the fact that it This is the first text where she explicitly discusses her encounter with Eastern practices and thought; it is also highly personal and biographical, something which up until this time in her oeuvre was always minimal. In many ways, this text sits between her middle phase of work and her latter phase of work. For this reason, I consider this text to be a significant turn in her thought, as she becomes increasingly entwined between East and West.

[12] The first examples of this are found in the collection of lectures known as *Sexes and Genealogies* ([1987] 1993), for example the essay 'Women, the sacred, money' (See SG, 77), *i love to you* ([1992] 1996) and *to be two* ([1994] 2000).

I think it is important to be clear on what Luce Irigaray means by the East, and to examine some of the scholarly criticism she has received for her Eastern excursions. We can group the criticisms of Luce Irigaray's thought under four main points:

a) that she fails to elaborate an adequate theory for cultural difference on two related counts: the first, as a cross-cultural theory between different cultures, the second, as a theory which is adequate for the already existing political issues of multiculturalism and the problems of migration (especially of women) found in Western nations (Deutscher 2002, 2003; Mookherjee 2005)

b) that she is guilty of orientalism by idealizing and essentializing the East as a monolithic entity where alternative and more sympathetic thought on femininity can be located and appropriated for their use in the further development of sexual difference (Deutscher 2002, 2003, Mookherjee 2005, Joy 2006)

c) that she makes the mistake of applying a psychoanalytic (and we should add philosophical) critique out of cultural context, because the insights of Western psychoanalysis (and

philosophy?) cannot apparently be applied to non-Western cultures (Mookherjee 2005, Deutscher 2002)

d) that she is not adequately grounded in the Eastern traditions, having learnt only the practices (of Yoga in a Western context) and not the languages, philosophies, textual traditions of the multiple South and Far Eastern traditions she makes reference to (Sokthan Yeng 2014). This leaves her open to both mistaken understandings but also risks of appropriating practices or concepts which in fact defeat her purposes. For example, appropriating a practice or idea with hidden patriarchal bias which reinforces the very limitations she is attempting to change (Joy 2006)

It is true that Luce Irigaray does at times make generalisations which by all accounts appear as essentialist idealisations of a monolithic East. This means that at times in *between east and west (2002)* we are often not exactly sure which tradition or which aspect of which culture she is talking about. At one moment she may be referring to the East, and then in the next moment to Tantra, and then in the next sentence to Indo-Aryan patriarchy and its opposition to more feminine Aboriginal culture. At times it is, and at times it isn't exactly clear what aspect of this multiplicity of traditions she is referring to, or if it is one monolithic tradition that she is proposing.

On the other hand, Luce Irigaray does in fact have a nuanced understanding of the East – as a multiplicity of traditions with a complex stratified history. In her defence she states, the East is quite clearly not a single cultural monolith, but is rather, a general term which she uses to cover 'multiple' traditions (BEW, 15). This multiplicity is a complicated one, not only because she makes various differentiations within the East without clarifying them (and uses various terms interchangeably, such as Far East, yoga, Buddhism, Tantra, India, Vedas and Hindu) but because she also makes even more general grand historical/pre-historical differentiations such as Aboriginal and Indo-Aryan cultures.[13]

It is not possible to go into these differences in depth here. I can only affirm that the East is not a singular monolithic entity, rather, it is a multiplicity of traditions with a complicated and stratified history, and that I do think Luce Irigaray is fully aware of this, even if she uses terms such as the East in her work.[14] In my opinion there still appears to be a lacuna when it comes to understanding the influence of Eastern traditions on Luce Irigaray's middle to later phases of work. This thesis, through a dialogue with Nishitani Keiji, goes some way towards addressing this. It is impossible to pinpoint the exact influences on a person's thought, especially someone as complex as Luce Irigaray, as she herself states, 'to explain what Western culture has given me –

[13] Here as Morny Joy rightly points out this last point is taken from Mircea Eliade's analysis which has been questioned (see Joy 2006, chapter six).

[14] Stratified history meaning that some aspects are repressed and forgotten, and some aspects are preserved and furthered, giving a multilayered history depending on who is writing it and when, see (BEW, 15).

and not given me – and what the practice of yoga and its tradition have given me – and not given me is not a simple task to carry out' (BEW, 49). Still, I consider it worth drawing out the major points of influence from three key sources, as it may help to facilitate a *passage between* Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray. There are three major influences that I want to highlight here. Firstly, the most explicit, and the least we can analyse textually is Yogic practice itself; secondly, are the fundamentals of Tantra; and finally, there is Jiddu Krishnamurti, who I suggest is of great influence on her philosophy.

Luce Irigaray began a long-term commitment to the practice and study of yoga in the early 1980's. She first explicitly discusses this in *between east and west* (2002). However, she returns to this in one of her most recent works *Through Vegetal Being (2016),* where she recounts her entry into a Yogic practice (TVB, 25-26). It was through a car accident that she came to practice Yoga. Her instructor was French and trained in the South Indian school of Krishnamacharya. He gave her exercises to cultivate spinal health and the breath, as well as recommending texts for her to study, and masters to meet. Here she also mentions Jiddu Krishnamurti and the Buddha. She herself admits that she did not have the cultural context of Indian life and language, but she studied texts such as the Vedas, the Sutras, especially the Yoga sutras by Patanjali, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhakti, and also novels and poetry, as well as good commentaries: Swami Sananda-Sarasvati, Sri Aurobindo, Mircea Eliade, Alain Danielou, Lilian Silburn, Jean Varenne and Heinrich Zimmer (TVB, 25-26). Here then we have a very good record of the depth of study she made in the Yogic tradition. Her approach to Yoga practice

then is primarily practical, as she looks to Eastern practices to regain her health, to help her understand herself, her body and her breath.

In her book *between east and west (2002)* Luce Irigaray discloses lessons learned or remembered from her Yogic practice and study. These are: to breathe and its relation to the body and speaking; to respect and cultivate sensible perceptions; to learn and to teach or the importance of the living teacher-student relationship; to live spiritually in the body and the flesh (BEW, 49-64). It is also important to note here, that at the end of her essay 'Eastern teachings' she also says what Yoga has not taught her, and this is threefold, one, sexuate difference, two the importance of reciprocity between persons (which is found in sexuate difference), and three, the importance of a woman's virginity (BEW, 64-71). We shall discuss these in more detail later as they are central contentions in the juxtaposition of Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji.

There are many other points of intersection between Luce Irigaray's thought and Asian philosophy, such as the centrality of masculine and feminine, what might be called Yin/Yang or Loma/Viloma in Chinese or Indian thought respectively (SG, DBT). And there is also the connection to her idea of the divine couple, *Śiva* and Parvati, as the mythological model of the dynamic between two subjects who are male and female lovers (BEW, TVB, TBB). There is cultivation through desire (BEW). There is also the mention of energy, what might be called Chi or Prana, in Chinese or Indian thought (BEW, TVB, TBT). There is also an occasional mention of *chakra* or psychic wheels of energy (SG, BEW, TBT,

TBB). These evocations in her texts are often easily missed or over looked, but they all point to a certain tradition in particular, which is influential across traditions of Buddhism and Yoga in South and East Asia. Here I am speaking of Tantra.

Space does not permit a full exploration of Luce Irigaray's relationship to Tantra here, if indeed there is one, for I cannot be sure that she has any real experience or study of its practices. However, as soon as we speak of energy, spiritualised coupling, chakras, Hatha Yoga, cultivation of the breath and senses, returning to a (divine) body, or overcoming the dualism of a transcendent heaven as good and the world of everyday sensible suffering as bad, or perhaps most of all, that desire itself is the path to emancipation, then we are in the realm of, or a realm akin to, Tantra. Georg Feuerstein (1998, x) defines Tantra as, 'an exceptionally ramified and complex esoteric tradition of Indic origin' which 'made its appearance around 500 CE' in the Indian Sub-continent as a fully-fledged movement or style but may well be of a much older origin. This complex and fluid movement spanned across Hinduism and Buddhism, greatly influencing practices of ritual and bodily cultivation for over a millennium. Practices such as Hatha Yoga, the most prominent Yoga practiced in the West, are in fact unthinkable or would be unrecognisable without the existence of Tantra.[15]

[15] Hatha is translated as Sun and Moon, which falls under the Yogic philosophical polar concepts of Loma/Viloma. Here we see a polarity which has multiple implications for the adherent when taking up bodily practices of a yogic nature. It is also heavily influenced by, if

Perhaps most significantly, much like Luce Irigaray, Tantra holds *kama* or desire to be the means to salvation; the path is not an ascetic one sacrificing the world for liberation, it is rather to emancipate one's self through this very world of desire and its cultivation. It is what Feuerstein (2011) calls the 'transmutation of desire' or 'the path of ecstasy'[16] where we can see that the cultivation of desire for the purposes of liberation are fundamental to both Tantra and Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexuate difference. We could add here also that her recent advocation of *Śiva* as a god for our times is also greatly influenced by her Tantric leanings, as *Śiva* is also of great importance to the Tantric traditions esoterical understanding of the transmutation of desire and the cultivation of energy (See Feuerstein 1998, 226-232).

In her most recent works, such as *Through Vegetal Being (2016)* Luce Irigaray reflects on her work *between east and west (2002)*. Here she also dwells on *Śiva* and his relationship to his consorts *Parvati* and *Kali*, which reinforces her model of two lovers who are different, from a perspective between East and West. *Śiva* is, for her, a god for our time as he is a god of transition: he is the god 'who is in charge of the passage from one age to another' (TVB, 70), he is also the 'god of love' (TVB, 70) and he is the god who partly offers a solution to the crisis that faced Nietzsche and our epoch – the problem of nihilism or the

not completely Tantric in nature. See Feuerstein, *Tantra: The path to ecstasy* (1998) and D.G.White (2000).

[16] See the chapter of the same name in G. Feuerstein's book *The path of Yoga (2011),* and the title of G. Feuerstein's book *Tantra: the path of ecstasy (1998)* respectively.

problem of sexuate difference. *Śiva* then, becomes the archetypical god for our times according to Luce Irigaray's most recent East-West adventures. He is a god of the elements and the body, a god who dances, a god of change, a god who is often coupled with one of his consorts *Parvati* or *Kali*.

Finally, the Sanskrit word Tantra literally means something woven together. This could be an ordered philosophical system or system of rituals, or even simply a text. This is where the English word textile comes from and it means that when Luce Irigaray describes her work as woven between traditions, she does so with this etymological understanding in mind. Her texts are weavings of her own practices, and her thought between traditions, much like Tantra was a weaving of diverse practices, rituals and texts, across multiple traditions (including Buddhism and Hinduism) in the first millennium C.E.

Another great influence on Luce Irigaray is Jiddu Krishamurti (1895-1986). It is unclear if she ever met him, but I consider Krishnamurti to be a major influence on her philosophy. For many people, especially in the Western academic world of philosophy, Krishnamurti is unknown.[17] Luce Irigaray makes only a handful of references to Krishnamurti in her texts. One of the most explicit references is found in *between east and west* is quite revealing, she

[17] For an excellent biographical account of Krishnamurti's relation to the Theosophical society and his life in general see Mary Luytens *The life and death of Krishnamurti* (J. Murray: London, 1990).

states:

> 'It is necessary to learn again to think without centering on the object, for example, to think in a living and free manner, unattached, neither egological nor possessive. This does not mean not thinking but being capable of going beyond the inertias of thought in order to set its energy free. Is this not the path shown by Buddha and, in our age, in his own way, by Krishnamurti' (BEW, 67)

Krishnamurti and the Buddha are clearly related for her. We shall examine her use of the image of the Buddha later, where we shall see the importance of our relation to the object. In fact, I consider Buddhism to have had only a minor influence on her thought, whereas Krishnamurti is without doubt a great influence, both explicitly and implicitly. His spirit is certainly woven into her texts as we find resonances between Luce Irigaray and Krishnamurti in the image of Buddha looking at a flower; as well as the idea of natural flowering of the human being; the objectification and technification of man; the cultivation of perception; the need for a return to nature in order to become human; and the fact that we live always in relationship, that is, that a human being is a relational being.[18]

[18] These ideas permeate all his talks. See for example, J. Krishnamurti *The First and Last Freedom* (1975)

For over thirty years Luce Irigaray has been engaging in both a Western education, writing and practice, alongside a sustained practice and study of Yoga. This means that any analysis of her thought overall is no easy task. In fact, such a task is probably impossible, and certainly difficult as she herself claims. Nevertheless, I am convinced that this cross-cultural adventure she undergoes underlies many of her later developments, and I suggest it is one of the main driving forces of her three phases: the shift to her middle phase occurred at the same time as she began a regular yogic practice; and the role of cultivating the breath in order to return to our bodies and the vegetal, is given as much importance as sexual difference, or even seen as a necessary pre-stage to understanding and realising sexual difference, in her latter phase and her most recent works (e.g. TVB, TBT). It is also this thorough engagement with Eastern practices that makes her work an example of feminist comparative philosopher, worthy of further fruitful hermeneutical dialogue across traditions.

2.3.b. Nishitani Keiji: between east/west

The influence and use of Eastern thought and practice is implicit to much of Luce Irigaray's thought from her middle phase onwards, and she does not appear to engage with the tradition as embodied in text. In Nishitani Keiji's works we find the most explicit attempt to move between East and West, and to bring together insights from Japanese Buddhist thought and practice, as well as the wider Buddhist philosophies found in South and East Asia. Nishitani Keiji has a specific understanding of East and West in his texts, and he places himself

between them throughout his life's work.

Nishitani Keiji's writings clearly show a wide gathering of ideas from various Buddhist traditions. However, we should not think that this Buddhist thinking is by any means tied to a definite school of Buddhism. Scholars take different views as to what the major Buddhist influences on Nishitani Keiji are, but much like when examining Luce Irigaray, I think it is very difficult to draw out these influences as they are often modified and deeply entwined.[19] Nishitani Keiji therefore, does not hold a specifically Buddhist position. In fact, he is critical of various Buddhist traditions in calling for their reformation in the contemporary world.[20] Therefore, he rather takes what Waldenfels (1980) describes as a very 'common' or 'everyday' Buddhist understanding; one broad in its textual appropriation. Most significantly however, during what we have called his mature period, Nishitani Keiji took up a momentous study of *Dōgen Zenji* (1200-1253) *Shōbōgenzō* from 1966-78. Both lecturing and publishing on probably the most important Zen master and medieval philosopher in Japanese history (Horio, 1997, 20). It was also during this time that we see his writings take an overtly Zen stance. Although he did draw copiously on the Zen tradition throughout his middle period, it is once he takes up the Buddhist standpoint,

[19] Jan Van Bragt sees him as taking up a position akin to the classical Buddha (which is problematic at best and highly unlikely) and also the central influence of *Nāgārjuna* (1983, 1992); Waldenfels (1980) also works from a perspective of *Nāgārjuna*'s influence on him; Carter (2006) sees the later work of Nishitani Keiji more influenced by Pure Land Buddhism; and several others make arguments showing his ideas and concepts to follow different key ideas in various pan-Asian Buddhist traditions.

[20] See for example 'Encountering no-religion' (1985), and 'On what I think about Buddhism' in *On Buddhism (2006)*.

that he begins to title his essays with explicit reference to Zen. For example, the article ‘Science and Zen’ (1965) is the first of many philosophical essays that he writes explicitly on Zen, along with 'The standpoint of Zen' (1967) perhaps being one of the definitive essays of his mature period.

Throughout this thesis, I tentatively follow Stambaugh (1999), Heisig (1996) and Parkes (2014) that the foremost Buddhist influence on Nishitani Keiji is *Dōgen*, and this goes well beyond philosophical inquiry, and well into the realms of practice and realization. Religion and Nothingness is permeated by *Dōgen*'s thought and the practice of 'just sitting’ (RN, 186-187) ‘body-mind dropping off’ (RN, 184-193) or 'thinking non-thinking’ (EE, 4) are all direct references to him. It is *Dōgen* who in many ways shows Nishitani Keiji how to grasp more clearly the insight into the reality of man through reality itself (RN, 5), and the conversation he cites in ‘Encounter with Emptiness’ (1984) which exemplifies the final standpoint from which he wants to philosophize is a conversation from *Dōgen*'s works and a classic story of Zen Buddhism.

Before we move on to a philosophical analysis of Nishitani Keiji’s method of dialogue, we should make one further and important note. Alongside his personal despair and struggle, his philosophical development and his dialogue across traditions, Nishitani Keiji was an arduous practitioner of Zazen meditation. Zazen is a deceptively simple sitting meditation practice found in most schools of Zen Buddhism. His meditation practice is extremely significant for us to at least recognise, if we are going to understand his philosophical

exposition, and we shall discuss it in detail in chapter four.

Nishitani Keiji took up Zen training as a layman in the 1930's and practiced regularly for over twenty years to complete his official training in the 1950's. We cannot simply ignore these many hours of Zen practice which he undertook for many years, they go hand in hand with his philosophical development. In fact, Horio (1997) offers us an outline of Nishitani Keiji's Zen practice which is once more set up in three stages which parallel his philosophical development. The first is of an interest in Zen meditation already in his youth; the second, is one of official lay practice for more than twenty years; the third, is finally working through philosophically a standpoint of Zen in his later writings exemplified as a 'thinking non thinking'. We can see then that Nishitani Keiji's increasing rigour in Zen practice parallels his philosophical development to the point where he wants to bridge the gap between Zen practice and his philosophy. In short, he wants to think from this Zen insight of *śūnyatā*.

It is reasonable therefore to demarcate Nishitani Keiji's thought into three phases. However, in keeping with the three phases approach, but including both his philosophical and his practical development, we could say that, the first phase is the critical assimilation of Western philosophy from his own personal background as a Japanese man who is educated in a university institution and discipline which is based on a European model. The second phase is marked by his in-depth engagement with Zen practice and a return to

the traditional texts of Zen and the wider Buddhist textual traditions. This results in his overcoming of what he sees as alienation caused by a loss of his own traditional roots, and the globalisation being brought about by the advancements of science and technology, which are mechanizing society and human beings on an unprecedented scale, which of course, at least in these forms, originate in Ancient Attica. The third mature phase is the poetic-aesthetic creative phase where his thought becomes more poetic and imagistic, evocative of the position he now embodies. This final phase is distinctly marked by his Zen practice and study, and his creative process of writing a unique philosophy, a process which he is engaged in for over thirty years. It is this more inclusive demarcation of three phases to which I am referring throughout this thesis, and for the most part I am using the publication of specific texts as the dates for demarcation: early, is prior to the publication of *The self overcoming of nihilism (1949)*; the middle, is up until the publication of 'The starting point of my philosophy' (1963); and everything after this is the late period.

From this juxtaposition of Nishitani Keiji's and Luce Irigaray's life and texts, we can see that there is a constant engagement which for both of them is a weaving between East and West making any attempt to separate their thought, practice and lives impossible. In this sense of weaving between East and West both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray are unique in the history of philosophy, as philosophers who engage in this space between traditions and texts, and who live this engagement in their daily bodily practices. In fact, I suggest that this creative drive within their respective philosophies is driven forward by their bodily and meditative practices. Both philosophers make major shifts in their

middle phase when these practices are clearly fundamental to their lives. This facilitates a certain creativity to their thought and work, and again all the more reason to bring them into dialogue.

2.4.a. Luce Irigaray's Cross-cultural method of naiveté

In this section we shall analyse the method of Luce Irigaray's cross-cultural dialogue: *naiveté*. *Naiveté* is entwined with the notions of *the between* or *passages between* and *renaissance*. As we have seen, Luce Irigaray's cross-cultural dialogue has received plenty of attention and ample criticism. The main aim here is to understand the method of *naiveté*, and its requirements for cross-cultural dialogue, so we can begin the dialogue between Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji.

As we might suspect, the main aim of Luce Irigaray's cross-cultural dialogue is to further support her fundamental thought of sexuate difference. The method of *naiveté* therefore, is not *naive*, it is a prejudice of sexuate difference in interpretation. In short, all other binary oppositions (nature-culture, matter-spirit and so on) can be set aside, including all theoretical reflections based on them, while we engage in cross-cultural dialogue, but not the binary of sexuate difference which is primordial and universal (we shall address these fundamental dimensions in more detail later.) It is enough to state here that we can assume any cross-cultural dialogue must recognise and

respect sexuate difference if it is to be an acceptable cross-cultural engagement for Luce Irigaray. Sexuate difference may then be more in-tune with feminist comparative philosophy than hermeneutics in general.

Nowhere to my knowledge does Luce Irigaray define precisely what she means by culture. It is clear for her, that there is a relation between the term 'culture' and the verb 'to cultivate' (See for example the essays, JTN and CD). Luce Irigaray also uses culture within the binary opposition of nature-culture. This is taken over from Hegel's use of culture as an individual's (the father's) transcendence of the family (nature) where we enter the realms of history and politics (EIC, BMH). Culture in the Hegelian sense would be a step upward from nature as a movement of spirit (*geist*) on its journey to higher realms including those of art, religion and philosophy. It is questionable whether nature is actually cut off and left behind in this case, or if it is the substrate of a continuum upwards towards higher levels of spirit. Whatever the case, for Hegel culture is masculine and civilisation is the realm of men, whereas women are left behind as nature (Lloyd, 1993; Stone, 2006).

For Luce Irigaray we have the possibility of masculine and feminine cultures (Joy, 2006, 96-91). In French *masculin* and *féminin* are broader in scope then their English equivalents masculine and feminine. *Mâle* and *femelle* are used in the strict biological sense (as in the classification of animals for example.) Masculine and feminine when used in the English language are considered to be the social and cultural attitudes, roles and gestures of an individual. Male and female are, like in French, the biological aspects. This leads

to a sex/gender distinction in the English language which does not necessarily map directly onto the French equivalents. For Luce Irigaray *masculin* and *féminin* encompass bodily existence as well as the socio-cultural significances of that bodily existence. This means that for her there is no strict sex/gender distinction. I use the English terms masculine and feminine with the same broader meaning as found in the French language and as used by Luce Irigaray (Jones, 2011, 4-7, Stone, 2006, 9-10). Luce Irigaray's work is in many ways an attempt to recover, discover and establish a feminine culture, while at the same ultimately she aims at cultivating a culture of sexuate difference between the two cultures of masculine and feminine.

In many ways, at least at the outset, Luce Irigaray's East-West engagement is one which attempts to sidestep an intentional or philosophical cross-cultural dialogue of words and speech (examples of this are found thoughtout BEW and ILTY). Instead, she grounds her very personal exchange in gesture, practice and her insights as a woman, from bodily activities such as hatha yoga, with a great focus on the breath (See BEW, TVB). This does not mean that she completely ignores the Eastern discourses of myth, religion, (pre)history and philosophy (and she herself makes use of words, speech and writing) but, it is a dialogue in the broadest of sense, not limited to or giving primacy to speech, words, texts or discourses. In other words, what she tries to achieve is a cross-cultural encounter rooted primarily in practice and gesture.

We should note here from the outset that Luce Irigaray's method results from the encounter; rather than an establishing a dialogue on a pre-established method. Her work is not self-reflexively grounded in scholarly methods of cross-cultural dialogue and there are good reasons for this. First of all, how could it be, if as discussed above, her engagement is one based in practice, gesture and bodily activities? Secondly, the reason for this appeal to gesture, practice and body is because for her, speech and discourse (especially philosophical discourse) is a man's province. Therefore, to speak across cultural differences as a woman is inherently problematic.

The danger is that woman erases herself by taking up a man's subject position and language, so she might enter a dialogue across cultural traditions. And third, in relation to this, we might say that she considers all discourses, categories of thought, and philosophy as such, to be prejudiced or dominated by the masculine culture and the predominantly male sex of all philosophers until the Nineteenth Century – we can recall from above: 'I speak as a woman and that the thing most refused to a woman is to do philosophy' (JLI, 97) and that 'any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"' (SP, 133). The implications of these claims require a rather unorthodox cross-cultural engagement. Hence, a different method (or form) of cross-cultural dialogue based on the two terms: *naiveté and between*.

There are three terms *naiveté*, *the between* and *renaissance* which are central to understanding Luce Irigaray's method of cross-cultural dialogue with

what she terms the East, and they have received scant attention in the scholarship surrounding her East-West encounter. I see *naiveté, the between* and *renaissance* as inextricably linked. Luce Irigaray's approach is one which she terms *naïve* and leads to what I call here the 'method' of *naiveté*. Finding herself *between* is a central pillar of her cross-cultural encounter which goes hand in hand with *naiveté*, and it is through *naiveté* that *passages between* different cultural horizons are attempted, leading to her sensing that she herself is 'woven between' two traditions (BEW, 10).

In the first instance *naiveté* is not really a method but more of an unskilled encounter with another who is different. It is in effect, very similar to Gadamer's concept of hermeneutics, i.e., a meeting with the strange. *Naiveté* is opened up by the interaction with another person (male or female) from another cultural horizon. At this level it is an accidental unskilful encounter, tallying with the standard definition of *naiveté* as 'showing a lack of experience, wisdom or judgement'.[21] We can see this in her autobiographical account of her encounter with a (male) yoga teacher:

> 'To tell the truth, my first encounter with a yoga teacher, which was rather conflictual, took place around the possibility of everything becoming conscious, as he declared to his students. As a psychoanalyst,

[21] Oxford dictionary entry for naïve.

I made him understand his naiveté. I could not see my own! And no more the fact that we were speaking from two different horizons' (BEW, 6-7)

Such an encounter brings to light of our own prejudices through the meeting between two people (male or female) from different cultural horizons. The point is that meeting another who speaks from a different horizon, with a different understanding of fundamental concepts such as 'conscious' and 'unconscious', shakes or challenges our own position, concepts and ingrained understanding. In the *naïve* meeting – which is nothing out of the ordinary, such meetings take place all the time in the rapidly globalising world in which we are living – the two in the encounter are shown their own blind spots, and their own naiveties, in their respective (mis) understandings which come to light through an accidental dialogue.[22] It is a sort of accidental uncultivated disposition toward another.

Somewhat ironically Luce Irigaray has been criticised for being *naïve* in her engagement with other cultures and for her multiculturalism. Penelope Deutscher (2002, 2003) is critical of many dimensions of Luce Irigaray's encounter detailed in *between east and west (2002)*. However, Deutscher is one of the few people who does mention Luce Irigaray's *naiveté* as a method or disposition. Unfortunately, she does not go far enough in her analysis of what

[22] Notably here, it is in relation to two respective cultural horizons, both concrete and actual in two different human beings. In this case male and female, but we are not discussing sexuate difference in relation to cultural difference yet. We are remaining on the level of culture.

Luce Irigaray means by the term *naiveté*, which would go a long way towards answering some of the criticisms we saw levelled against her in the introduction.

Deutscher states merely that *naiveté* is a 'foetus like openness to the new', and secondly, that it is being 'born to my life' (Deutscher, 2002, 5).[23] Neither of these really grasp the full significance of *naiveté* in the sense that Luce Irigaray is using it. These two claims are interconnected, and it is somewhat difficult to address them separately. We should begin with the second of them – that *naiveté* is being 'born to my life' – because this is not really the case. Luce Irigaray when she says she is 'born to my life', is in fact referring to a second birth which is not *naiveté* as such but what she more specifically calls a *renaissance*. In Old French renaissance means literally "rebirth", and usually in a spiritual sense. It also has a relation to nature, this time plants, from *renastre* to "grow anew", and in Modern French it is to "be reborn". Its roots lie in the Latin *renasci* 'be born again, rise again, reappear, be renewed.'[24] 'Being born to my life' is actually what Luce Irigaray calls her personal *renaissance* – an event which is intimately linked to *naiveté*, perhaps the result of *naiveté*, and even necessary for *naiveté* to be possible as a method, but it is not *naiveté* itself.

Naiveté is, as Deutscher claims, a 'foetus like openness to the new' but it requires a little more fleshing out than she affords it. He or she, in the placenta

[23] The quotations here are taken from p.5 of Luce Irigaray's *between east and west (2002)*

[24] See Etymology online entry for 'Renaissance'.

of the mother, is in a naïve state: natural, innocent and unaffected.[25] However, when we are born we are no longer foetus like. Our mother breathes for us prior to birth. When we are in the foetal state we are dependent on her for our breath. To be born from our mother means that we breathe for ourselves and this is our first autonomous gesture. For Luce Irigaray, 'to be born' is to breathe for one's self (BEW, 73). However, the birth from our mother, and our first autonomous gesture, are further enveloped by a culture which acts like a socio-cultural placenta where we breathe stale air (BEW, 74). This means that we are born from one foetal state into another 'socio-cultural' foetus like state. To be born to 'this life' means a man or woman must, 'move away from a socio-cultural placenta. Thus I can begin to be born, to no longer live from the breath of anyone, as the foetus does in the womb of its mother and as man often does inside a given historical horizon' (BEW, 5)

Luce Irigaray claims that she is born again to her own life (BEW, 5). A life beyond the limitations of her first socio-cultural placenta with its stale air. This is intimately linked to learning to breathe anew. She states, 'first, I learned to breathe. Breathing, according to me, corresponds to taking charge of one's own life' (BEW, 50). She learnt to breathe again, through her encounter with another culture, specifically through her practice of Yoga. She learnt to breathe again 'naïvely at first and then with the aid of masters from the East, or trained in the East' (BEW, 6). It was a gradual process but one which came to constitute

[25] See Oxford dictionary entry for naïve.

the very possibility of a new understanding of herself, her relationship to the other, to her cultural horizon and the world.

This learning to breathe anew lead to nothing less than what she terms a personal *renaissance*, what we might call a rebirth or an enlightenment; what we might call a spiritual awakening, where we perceive the world, the good and the beautiful anew (BEW, 5). It was a moving away from the socio-cultural placenta, via a meeting with another socio-cultural horizon, resulting in being (re)born woven between socio-cultural horizons. Luce Irigaray was effectively reborn through the breath to a new autonomy. This we should remember is the paternalistic and patriarchal socio-cultural placenta which she is so heavily critical of in her earlier phase of work. The breath is the source of this rebirth and it is the central lesson of Luce Irigaray's own encounter, the central lesson she wishes to pass on as a 'way', and the central essay of *between east and west*.

Naiveté then is the openness to being born anew, and as a birthing, it occurs through encountering a new world, a new horizon and the act of breathing anew. It is a bodily realisation and once again subversive. It is best seen through our birth from within the mother's placenta to the world outside our mother. In short, our cultural horizon is also like our mother, where we breathe without autonomy and are yet to be born to our life; or we could say that our cultural horizon is our father (as the patriarchal masculine society we live in) and hence the need for being born anew from it is paramount; so that we may exit the foetal like dependence on him, and be born to our own life

beyond patriarchy. *Naiveté* then is not so naïve. It is a strategy for effectively exiting this patriarchal placenta and one of the main avenues for this to open up as a possibility is through cross-cultural dialogue – encountering the strange, and learning from it, such as practices for cultivation of the breath.

We have already mentioned passages between above. In *between east and west (2002)* there are several passages (nature, the body, the breath, life as vitality, human consciousness) which are suggested as connecting paths between or prior to cross-cultural dialogue. Here we can take the same key example of the breath to demonstrate what are passages between and how we might cultivate them. We have already mentioned one very significant passage between and that is the breath. Luce Irigaray makes a reference to the Ancient Greek philosophers Aristotle and Empedocles in relation to the breath and the soul (BEW, 7). Here her point is that the breath is related to the soul and for her, cultivation of the breath is spiritualisation of the soul which includes the body (as breath is a bodily activity). She relates this to the Yogic masters from the East and suggests that there is a repressed or forgotten link between traditions here, a passage between two cultures which has been forgotten. These repressions make it difficult to restore 'bridges between traditions' (BEW 7). Here it seems then that when she speaks of *passages between*, and even the position of being woven between, she is speaking about underlying connections between East and West and the need to restore them.

However, for her, reconstituting *passages between* cultural differences must be made upon the fundamental difference of sexuate difference. Cultural difference for Luce Irigaray, is ultimately secondary; if we cultivate *passages between* such as the breath they are still to be sexuated – men and women are I-he and I-She because they breath differently. Sexuate difference is the real primordial difference which underlies any *passage between* socio-placentae. A culture of sexuate difference, therefore, must underlie any cultural differences:

> 'Sexual difference is an immediate natural given and it is a real and irreducible component of the universal. The whole of human kind is composed of women and men and of nothing else. The problem of race is, in fact, a secondary problem' (ILTY, 47)[26]

The main point which we can draw out from Luce Irigaray's method of *naiveté* is that although all other differences are subject to *naiveté*, sexuate difference is not. She grounds her philosophy on sexuate difference as irreducible. The method of *naiveté* then is in some sense a bracketing off, of the usual conceptual frameworks of understanding in favour of seeing two subjects: male and female, who have different bodies and ways of breathing, and two cultures, masculine and feminine, conjoined in a culture of sexuate difference. Ultimately, for her, a beyond East and West, would be a global culture of sexuate

[26] Such claims have received considerable attention in the scholarship (Stone 2006; Jones 2011; Deutscher 2002, 2003).

difference. *Naiveté* may bracket off the dualistic conceptual framework in order that we might be born anew and think something new. Nevertheless, sexuate difference remains primordial to the method of *naiveté*, or we might say, is placed at its fundamental ground, i.e., it is Luce Irigaray's fundamental enabling prejudice or her ultimate horizon. It is her standpoint, as a bodily-breathing position on a sexuate field of understanding.

2.4.b. Nishitani Keiji's dialogue between East-West

It is necessary if we are going to understand Nishitani Keiji's philosophy to examine two very frequently used hermeneutical concepts – field (K. 場Pr. *ba*) and standpoint (K. 立場Pr. *tachiba*). They are both taken from everyday Japanese speech, but they are given more philosophical weight by Nishitani Keiji. The two terms are used hermeneutically to give a distinct quality to the interpretive analysis of our existence. They relate closely to Gadamer's hermeneutics; although there is no necessary connection, the terms rather fulfil similar purposes with differing functionalities.

The first term *ba* (場) can be used in everyday language to mean place, spot, space, discipline, sphere or realm.[27] Interestingly, in Japanese, it is also

[27] Interestingly it is made up of three parts: 土 日 勿. The first means earth, ground; the second, sun, Japan or counter of days; the third, means not, must not, be not. The combination from the position of etymology then is quite interesting. It is earth and sun, two of the most important and primal symbols of human language and the negation.

used to translate the concept “field” from gestalt therapy. However, it is also used by Nishida Kitarō in his concept of “logic of place” (場所 *basho*) note the presence of the same character 場 (*ba*) for field here. It is important for us to at least foreground this concept because Nishitani Keiji speaks often of the field of self-consciousness, the field of nihility, and the field of *śūnyatā*. The translation as field gives a spatial and temporal quality to a philosophical concept which is in-keeping with his existential philosophy. In many respects, “field” is used in a similar manner as tradition and prejudices that we discussed earlier in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. The main difference is the spatial everyday quality of “field” and that it must be given content, for example, the field of (…). It includes the textual quality Gadamer gives to tradition, but also spatialises it. This will be clearer when we discuss the second of these concepts *tachiba* (立場) or standpoint.

Heisig (2001, 222) is one of the few people to discuss Nishitani Keiji’s use of standpoint. He points out two reasons behind it: first, it is a shift towards Nietzsche’s perspective on reality as opposed to a logic of reality; and second, it better serves his attempt to express:

> ‘the Buddhist ideal of the middle way between the outright acceptance of the world as objectively real and the outright objection of it as subjective and illusory, namely a standpoint from which one can see

both ideas as two sides of the same reality' (Heisig, 2001, 222)

Tachiba (K. 立場) or standpoint is Nishitani Keiji's extension of the character *ba* (field) to *tachiba* (standpoint, position, situation) a term frequently used in all his works from the middle period onwards. In Japanese, it tends to mean a perspective or an opinion on a subject, for instance, the Professor's *tachiba* was pro-democratic. Although Nishitani Keiji never explains its precise use in his thought it seems to both include and go further than this common usage. It denotes an individual's position: spatial, temporal, conceptual, cultural. It is the position of the determinate individual's existence which is where he or she stands (*tachi*) on a field (*ba*) which might be one of self-consciousness, nihility or *śūnyatā* for example. It is used in the title of many of his essays, for example, 'the standpoint of *śūnyatā*', or 'the standpoint of Zen'.

In short, I want to suggest that philosophical concepts are also rooted in place and time which is not only historical, but also, metaphysical. We as individuals stand on a field, and where we stand has a particular way of framing our understanding of our existence. It allows us to see some things but not others. I want to suggest that *tachiba* or standpoint is therefore similar in many respects to prejudice as found in Gadamer's thought. The difference here is that this is more firmly individualised and localised in the body, even though a standpoint can still be shared, as in shared prejudices. My reading of Nishitani Keiji's use of *tachiba* gives it a philosophical quality as a spatial-temporal and

bodily quality to our horizon. It is the very bodily place of our individual perspective on the field on which we stand, and from where we engage in dialogue with another.

One of the major distinguishing features of Nishitani Keiji's work is his persistent engagement in what he calls a dialogue between East and West. Nishitani Keiji himself states in response to criticism of his thought and his relation to politics of his time, that fundamentally his position is one of dialogue, and I think we should not take this claim lightly.[28] The centrality of East-West dialogue is obvious in Nishitani Keiji's work and has received plenty of scholarly attention (Davis, 2011, 2017; Ueda, 2011; Heisig, 2001; Waldenfels, 1980). Much like we saw with Luce Irigaray, it is somewhat problematic to attempt to analyse or categorise his thought by discerning what is Eastern and what is Western within it. His thought is also so thoroughly woven between different traditions from different geographical locations, with their own textual traditions and their own practices and rituals, that it makes little sense to try to separate out the different strand within it.

Nishitani Keiji himself considers himself to be 'between' traditions; that is, between what he considers to be East and West, between different religious traditions, between philosophy and religion as such, and between

[28] See Yusa (1992, 153). For an excellent overview of these political misadventures see Goto-Jones, C. (ed.) 2008*)* and Davis (2011; 2017). I shall not touch on them in this thesis.

thought and practice, as he takes a stand 'at one and the same time' both 'within and without' of the confines of tradition (RN, xlix) and as he engages in the discussion between religious thought and antireligious thought he positions himself in a 'no man's land … whose borders shift unevenly' (RN, xlviii). We can analyse Nishitani Keiji's understanding of the East/West dialogue into three dimensions: 1) a reflection on Eastern culture with the help of Western philosophy; 2) a broadening of the tradition of Western philosophy into an East-West delimited thinking with the emergence of a Japanese philosophy; and 3) an emerging global world defined as the age of no-religion with a specific global thinking which, in brief, is technical and scientific.

Nishitani Keiji considers his work to be philosophy; but, according to him, we must expand our understanding of what is usually called philosophy in the European tradition with its Ancient Attic origins (EE, NK). This new understanding of philosophy will take place through a dialogue between Eastern thought and Western philosophy, as he states that 'we are faced with the ineluctable necessity of re-thinking once more Oriental thought and philosophy with the help of what we learned from Western philosophy' (EE, 2). The aim is therefore, no less than a mutual transformation of both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions through the conjoining of *śūnyatā* and reason (Davis, 2011, 40). His Zen philosophy is a way of working towards or within that existential path towards intuitive wisdom or *Prajñā* (Davis, 2011, 40). Philosophy, in a sense, becomes a tool of Nishitani Keiji's religious inquiry, hence a Zen philosophy.

The main problem of Nishitani Keiji's life long thought was to think the problem of nothingness, and to approach it 'as a problem of philosophy' (EE, 2). In short, Nishitani Keiji's philosophy is a thorough engagement with the problem of nothingness (nihility, nihilism and *śūnyatā*) through which he elaborates a modern-Buddhist perspective as a 'thinking non-thinking', which includes many references to/and elaborations of Zen poetry; Zen *kōan*, *mondō* and slogans,[29] and facilitates the self-overcoming of nihilism which necessitates an overcoming of traditional metaphysics, and what he considers to be the false self which depends on it. His thought then is inescapably bound up with the Western philosophical tradition and it conspires with the rapidly globalising European culture with its accompanying prejudice toward subjectivity and thinking.

[29] Heine and Wright (2000, 3) define the term *kōan* as 'enigmatic and often shocking spiritual expressions based on dialogical encounters between masters and disciples that were used as pedagogical tools for religious training in the Zen (*C. Ch'an*) Buddhist tradition.' *Kōan became a literary pedagogical tradition which first arose out of* spontaneous question and answer meetings (*mondō*) between Zen master and disciple or between two Zen practitioners/masters in given situations (See Dumoulin 1979, 65) and Zen slogans are, Welter (2000) suggests, even more ancient than many codified *kōan* or *mondō*. These 'slogans' are often referred to in Zen teachings, and they have perhaps even more unconscious cultural weight in East Asia (particularily China and Japan where the Ch'an and Zen traditions were so influential). The slogans show evidence of a non-scriptural oral-practice based tradition. Zen slogans such as *'transmission from mind to mind'* and *'a special transmission from outside the teaching'* are short encapsulations of the fundamental message of Zen. This aids in their attempt to refute any doctrine or teaching capturable in words.

We can agree that Nishitani Keiji's engagement with the Western philosophical tradition is as he states, 'a detour' (SP, 29). It is a detour required because of the problem of nothingness, and the nihilism which he locates in the Western philosophical tradition, and which he fears is the root of what is becoming a global phenomenon (we shall explore this in the next chapter). This he feels most evidently from his own experience and understanding of the rapid modernisation (and Europeanization) of Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1912). However, he clearly sees in his own heart that a spirit of another living tradition exists: 'In our hearts the spirit fostered in that Eastern culture exists as a living tradition' (EE, 2). It is from the well of this Eastern tradition that he wants to draw, to offer something 'other' in response to the problems of the contemporary world. He considers this long history of Eastern culture to be a living tradition of which he is a part. He wants to re-think this tradition therefore, with the help of Western philosophy, in order to make a 'fundamental reflection on our [Eastern] historical and cultural legacy' (EE, 2). For him this is a mutually beneficial impetus behind an East-West dialogue. In many respects then, we can see that this dialogue between East and West is for Nishitani Keiji, a dialogue of difference necessary for mutual understanding and transformation.

I hope it is apparent that Nishitani Keiji wants to broaden the philosophical horizons of the Western tradition. In doing this, he is quite ambitious in scope. He wants to redefine 'philosophy' so that he can include his standpoint within it, even if he takes a very different approach to the tradition of philosophy hitherto. Simply put, he would like to 'enlarge the concept of

philosophy' (SP, 24). As he firmly states, 'I myself think that from now on philosophical thought should transcend the distinction between East and West and establish itself on a broader foundation' (SP, 24). This broader foundation will include insights from different traditions, such as the Buddhist traditions that he is most influenced by, and it will now transcend distinctions between East and West, distinctions that were perhaps always false to begin with. We can see then that this East-West dialogue is a stage to a dialogue which shall take place on a broader or more fundamental grounding.[30]

Nishitani Keiji's philosophy, therefore, can be considered as a dialogue between East and West in the usual sense that we might use these terms. His aim is to expand the modern discourse of (mono)philosophy beyond its narrow and particular origins, into a global category of (poli)philosophy which allows for heterogeneous differences in philosophical practice (EE, TWD). The first step for this is the possibility of an 'other philosophy' which can offer another position in dialogue with the European tradition of philosophy. We might want to call this a Zen philosophy which he wants to bring into an East-West dialogue with the existing tradition of European philosophy, to gain insight into how to face the problems of today's global world. Or we might want to make a bolder claim that it is a Zen philosophical hermeneutics which actually supercedes the other philosophies and offers a field on which they all take place and a standpoint of standpoints as Heisig calls it (2001, 223).[31]

[30] For an excellent discussion of this see Davis (2017, SEP).
[31] See also Davis' discussion of East-West dialogue in the Kyoto school (2017)

Nishitani Keiji is well aware of the differences in what he sees at this stage as two 'philosophical' traditions, and whether his new synthesis can even be considered philosophy from the European philosopher's standpoint:

> 'the basic character of Buddhist thought is in some respects [qualitatively] different from the thought that has dominated Western philosophy… so there may be some problem in calling this standpoint of mine 'philosophical'' (SP, 24)

The main reasons for this qualitative difference are its new-found origins, its basis in *śūnyatā*, rather than being or nothingness; its denial of abstract metaphysical thinking, in favour of existential thinking; and its situatedness between traditions, religions, geographical locations, disciplines, and thought/practice. All of these are held together for Nishitani Keiji in his living standpoint of Zen.

In fact, I consider this qualitative difference in Nishitani Keiji's philosophy to be much more significant than he himself modestly underplays. Following Jin Y. Park (2010, 7) we can think of a Buddhist engagement with Western philosophy as subversive of an exclusively European philosophical tradition. Nishitani Keiji always approaches the East-West discourse with a

sense of dialogue and co-operation; but it is still the questioning of the universal philosophical claims of Western philosophy by the 'other' which is not dissimilar to the colonial, post-colonial, black American and feminist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Park, 2010, 7). And in a way it is the simplest critique, if we think in terms of Zazen; and the simplest overcoming of nihilism in Western thought, if we think in terms of a new 'self-awareness of reality' (RN, 5).[32] To be a living example of a position which is inherently critical of the dominant tradition around you is surely the most threatening and subversive act, as well as it being a great risk. Especially when the practice of this subversion requires nothing but the re-orientation of one's way of thinking, through one's own body, breath and awareness. I think this subversive quality of bodily practice coupled with dialogue, thought and writing is one of the main points of similarity between Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji.

However, for Nishitani Keiji the key to opening up the problems of Western culture is through philosophical and religious dialogue, as part of a mutual dialogical transformation of traditions, thereby creating a truly global culture (ENR, 344). The Buddhist teaching of *śūnyatā*, is discovered through such a dialogue, and he considers it to be the most significant contribution of what he calls Eastern thought to the possibility of an emerging global philosophy (Ueda, 2011). His unique philosophy, therefore, brings the concept

[32] Here consider the article 'Awakening of self in Buddhism' (1966), where Nishitani Keiji claims the Buddhist insight of no-self changes the caste system and re-orders Indian society on more equal grounds of enlightenment available to all. According to him then, an insight into 'true self' is necessarily an insight into intersubjectivity, and, therefore, ethics and politics follow immediately from self-transformation or self-realisation.

of *śūnyatā* into dialogue with Western philosophy. For him, 'the whole world is rapidly becoming one world' (RTA, 147). The East and the West are being transcended, but Nishitani Keiji is deeply sensitive to what this means and the demands it places upon us, and moreover, whether this transcendence is taking place on the appropriate field. Writing in 1966 he states:

> 'with the encounter of East and West proceeding in all fields of human activity at a surprisingly rapid tempo, mutual understanding is, needless to say, one of the most important tasks facing mankind today' (RTA, 145)

He goes on,

> 'among the many difficulties lying hidden along the way of this task, the greatest appears when, trying to penetrate in some degree the inner thought, feelings and purposes of our copartners, we find words and concepts, the inevitable vehicles of this communication, rising up time and again to bar the way' (RTA, 145)

From this we hear Nishitani Keiji's very direct intention to open lines of communication between people or 'copartners'. This dialogue is crucial for him if we are to come to a truly deep understanding of each other, and ourselves,

in this new global world. Philosophy, if it is to have a future, must strive to penetrate deeply into our self-understanding, in order that we might be able to speak with each other in new ways, with old and new concepts and words. It must be a way of thinking which points the way to bring about a fundamental shift in our self-understanding:

> 'The only possible way of a true encounter and mutual understanding of East and West in the most basic locus of human existence... seems to be discovered solely through candid self-exposure to the deep complexities of the actual world and by grasping therein some new point of departure. That would mean, in truth, to delve into the basis of existence itself through and through until we reach the hidden source; the source in which originates the present emergence of the one world with its thorough and universal secularisation of human life, and from which are arising now all sorts of social "progress" through the rapid development of science and technology, as well as the devastation of traditional culture progressing side by side with the "progress" of modern civilisation' (RTA, 147)

This is his Nishitani Keiji's hermeneutics – the open space of truth where dialogue or heart to heart encounter can occur. In this section, I have outlined two approaches to cross-cultural dialogue. We can see clearly that this focus of an open encounter between different traditions, however, does not take into consideration sexuate difference. There is, therefore, a potential danger

that such a global philosophy between East and West could eradicate the emerging (or remnants of) a feminine culture as understood by Luce Irigaray, unless I can suggest a way of weaving together their respective key fundamental standpoints and self-interpretations. It is to these that we must now turn.

2.5.a. Sexuate difference and self-understanding

Luce Irigaray finds the historical philosophical subject extremely problematic. She states conclusively that subjectivity is never neutral; for there is no abstract neutered perspective or point of view, and no possible abstract or neutral subject. For her, 'any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"' (SP, 133). She explains that the "subject" is 'father, mother, and child(ren). And the relationships between them. He is masculine and feminine and the relationships between them' (SP, 133). What Luce Irigaray is stressing here is that all definitions and theories in the history of Western philosophy can be considered as "masculine" which finally bring about a (masculine) neuter subject in modern philosophy, i.e., a reduction of everything to the same, which for her results in nihilism, as we shall see in the following chapter. If a woman doesn't first learn to speak for herself she will be subsumed as a neutral subject within this same. She will simply remain as 'entities or things, earth, depths, reserves which give birth, mother, do housework, with whom one makes love, etc. but not partners in discourse' (TD, 43). If a woman merely obtains a voice in the existing phallogocentric order, if she manages to speak as a subject, as an 'I', without differentiating that subject sexuately, then it can be no other than the voice of man speaking through a woman, a male or

(masculine) neutral voice, and woman as *woman*, therefore, still does not exist as a subject.

Fundamentally, the self then, according to Luce Irigaray, is relational: I exist always in relation to others. This is demonstrated by the primacy of our relationship to our mother, 'we would not exist without having made up a relational world with our mother' (CN, 42). Although this relationship is not strictly speaking intersubjective because we are not autonomous and conscious subjects (who breathe autonomously, speak for themselves, and are conscious of our sexuated intersubjectivity) we are still indebted to this relationship to our mother for our existence; and this existence is still relational (if not wholly intersubjective) even prior to birth, 'we are not yet two subjects in a certain way, but we already are two subjective worlds in relation with one another' (CN, 42). In short, for her, to be, is to be conceived. We, ourselves and our culture, tend to forget this origin of our existence which is unconscious to us at the time. If we do not actively remember our origin rooted in a (pre-conscious) intersubjectivity, then we can never really become (or understand) ourselves as a conscious intersubjective self in a world made up between subjects who are different, i.e., sexuate difference.

This necessarily intersubjective self, for Luce Irigaray, is a combination or mixture of the subjective and the objective. The subjective side is that 'which belongs to the subject as such, a subject which is not always the same' (CN, 41). The subjective is in effect the transcendence of the intersubjective self. By

transcendence Luce Irigaray means that which in myself (male or female) and the other (male or female) always escapes me (ILTY, 103). In the first case it is my birth, something I can perhaps never understand and something which transcends my existence in that it precedes me. I cannot know how I came to be. I was completely unconscious of this. In the second case it is that which I am, that which I can never "know" (as an object of cognition for a subject) and it is that which I can never see: I am invisible to myself. It is the mystery that I (he or she) am to myself via both my birth and my current existence. In the third case, it is founded on the fact that myself and another (whether he or she) 'may not be substituted for one another' (ILTY, 103) or that 'I cannot understand nor even perceive the other in its totality' (CN, 42). This radically individualizes the intersubjective self because each self, even though intersubjective, is also unique according to their transcendence. However, this radical individualisation, or mystery of the irreplaceable self that I am, is always grounded in my objectivity. The transcendence of subjectivity is not immediate or outside of the world but always found in objectivity.

For Luce Irigaray, the objective is that 'which exists outside the subject and his, or her, intervention in a pre-given world' (CN, 41). In order to explain, she gives the example of living-thing such as a tree:

> 'meeting with a tree, I could say that I meet with something which is objective with respect to me. One could object that there exist ways of cultivating trees that remove them from their objective presence. One

could also object that in a table made by an artisan or an artist, there remains a part of the objective material while the actual form has been given by a human subjectivity' (CON, 41)

Here we see a sort of gradation or fluidity between the subjective and the objective. This will be important later when we return to this in our discussion of non-duality. For now, it is enough to say that the tree in its uncultivated existence is objective to us. But, if it was planted, tended and grown by us, it becomes mixed with the subjectivity of the male or female who tends it.

According to Luce Irigaray, gender is our primary objectivity. Our gender is our bodily relational sameness or difference to our mother and it is a pre-given or an objectivity for us. It is at first a pre-given (objective) bodily relational difference or sameness to our mother received at (or even before) birth. It is then possible to attain to this gendered objectivity by cultivating our relations to our mother, through our bodies, our breath and our speech. This is what she calls *genre* (Jones, 2011, 191;) a style of cultivation which she later calls, sexuation; a frame, or set of limits to our existence which is our 'horizon' of gender (Lorraine, 1999, 87-89), within which we can cultivate our singularity without getting lost in an infinite becoming (TBT, 3; Lorraine, 1999, 87).

It seems that on both sides of our self-existence there rests an unknowability. We must exist between the pre-given and the transcendent,

between two unknowables: one, of birth; and the other, who I am right now in this moment. This mystery of the intersubjective self and its transcendence is heightened in the case of meeting another autonomous intersubjective self, especially for Luce Irigaray, if they are of a different gender (CN, 42). But even if they are the same gender, this other is radically different to me because of this subjective transcendence that they are. The other (he or she) is for me radically other, they or I, am unique and cannot be exchanged or known, and of course vice versa. I may be able to perceive the other's body, actions etc. through my senses and mind but I can never be them, they are different to me, and what they are in their deepest sense beyond me, i.e., transcendent (CN, 42).

Luce Irigaray acknowledges that even though she explains her work in three phases sexuate difference is the central theme of her thought. It is so important to her that she claims, 'Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue of our age... [it] is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through' (ED, 5). For Luce Irigaray, sexuate difference is without doubt the single question which she has pursued throughout her life's work, as she struggled to find herself, and her own salvation in a world where her existence as a subject in her own right is denied.

As we have seen, this thinking through of sexuate difference is in its first phase, a direct engagement with the symbolic male order: the phallocratic order, and the need for intelligent and creative methods of subversion. The second phase is a positive engagement with that order, to articulate a female

subject position and a feminine between women culture, with a corresponding language, symbolic order, imaginary and civil identity of their own. The sheer scale of ambition in this first and second phase is quite incredible. Not to mention the third phase, where a relational difference between two 'equal' and different subjects with their own respective languages, symbolic orders and civil identities is to be brought about. Unfortunately, this also presumes the existing male symbolic order is a desirable one for men, something I question, and I suggest Nishitani Keiji does also, as we see it as inadequate and at its root nihilistic.

We need to clarify two key points on sexuate difference here, before we enter dialogue with Nishitani Keiji. The first, is its relational quality which is structured by our birth or our origin. The second, is its relational quality between two different subjects, who relate differently to the phenomenon of birth, and therefore create a dynamic between two different kinds of subject. These two are thoroughly entwined, but for hermeneutical reasons it might help to pull them slightly apart. Sexuate difference, for Luce Irigaray, is a relational difference resulting in two different and irreducible subjects:

> 'To be born a girl of a woman, someone belonging to the same gender, and with the ability to engender like her, or to be born a boy of a woman, someone of a different gender, and with whom subjective relations will be complex, notably because it will be impossible for him to engender as she does, entails a different structuring of subjectivity'

(ILTY, 90)

Our birth is our origin, and our mother is the fundamental relation which structures our existence. The fact that one subject is capable of the same act of engendering human life within themselves, and another is not capable of this same feat of creation within themselves, causes a split in subject formation; because we cannot relate to the first other, the mother, in the same way - a little boy cannot relate to his mother as the same as him, whereas a little girl can. This means, that the first other for a girl is a subject like her, while the first other for a boy is a subject different to him. As Luce Irigaray states, this causes a fundamentally different orientation of two different subjects:

> 'For a girl, conditions for inter-subjective relations will be favourable, whereas a boy will have to interpose objects and the construction of an own homocultural and homosocial world, in order to protect himself from the mystery, indeed the abyss, that his origin, his mother, represents for him' (ILTY, 90)

We shall return to this question of the constructed homosocial world and the abyss in chapter three. For her, it is the fundamental cause of nihilism in masculine culture and Western philosophy. For now, it is important to grasp the basic primacy of birth in her thought and how it structures our self-understanding as a subject and our relation to other subjects and objects.

Luce Irigaray stresses again and again, that sexuate difference is not a simple difference due to educational stereotypes, nor does it make sense to speak of essentialism according to biology or sociology.[33] For her, a subject is context bound, he or she, is a living breathing body, born into a world of subjects and objects, and language, which shapes him or her relationally. Therefore, a subject is never reducible to biology, psychology, or any kind of essence. I consider Luce Irigaray's thought as non-essential in the sense that an essence is a fixed substantial existence. Her thought is thoroughly relational – it is what she calls a material ontology, paradoxical in many ways, but only to the essentialist ear that hears words and concepts as fixed objects thereby giving them a fixed existence.

Finally, what is sexuate difference as it pertains to two subjects who are different, what Luce Irigaray calls the 'between-two'? For her:

[33] Much of the debate concerning Irigaray's work is concerning her essentialism. It is held that her early work was 'politically' or 'strategically' essentialist in defence of her early work. Her later work however, has been defended as a 'realist; essentialism. See, Alison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the philosophy of sexual difference* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) Chapter 1, p.18-51. Here a good survey of the four main critiques of sexuate difference is also made. See also, Alison Stone, 'From political to realist essentialism' in *Feminist theory*, 2004, London, Sage Vol. 5:1 [5-23]. Although I also have a sympathy for a (reworked) nature orientated perspective, I have trouble with the categorisation of 'Realist' essentialism. For another good overview of this debate and an alternative defence of sexuat difference, see Braidotti, R. *(2002)* and Schor *(1994)*

> ‘in order for the between-two to subsist, transcendence must be kept between the two… it is a question of the transcendence of an irreducible difference between two, of which the most universal paradigm lies between man and woman’ (IBSW, 18)

Sexuate difference then, is not limited to the separate existence of man on the one side and a woman on the other, it is rather the between space that operates as an irreducible difference of man and woman and a transcendence in relation. This is, according to her, the most universal paradigm for bringing about this transcendence in relation. It is:

> ‘a third woven each time by the two … possible through the passage from sharing our needs to sharing our desire … [This] requires an alternation of being and letting be in each one and not a division of these kinds of behaviour between two subjects’ (IBSW, 19)

Sexuate difference is a living relation which emerges through the on-going relating of two sexuate identities which are ontologically irreconcilable, resulting in ‘a third’, a difference between which preserves them. This is for Luce Irigaray, a containment of the negative, a between that can never be surmounted by either side of the mystery (JLI, 110). As she says, speaking with a man,

> ‘you have a different body, you are in a different relational world, you are a boy born of a woman and that implies on your part a whole world-construction different from mine, a different relational world, a different cultural world. Between us there is really a mystery. Yes, there's an irreducible mystery between man and woman’ (JLI, 110)

It is a thoroughly interdependent relating of man and woman which guarantees a transcendental ethical between: a mystery. But this is not something to think and then to know. It is not something we can capture in words and concepts and appropriate as a thing for our ownership. It is a living relating possibility, a born possibility, with no guarantees for *women* or *men*. It is for her always 'completely new' and opening out on to a future where new values can be created (JLI, 96).

We shall discuss Luce Irigaray’s fundamental thought in more detail over the coming chapters. We can already see here that the completely new is within the bounds of the sexuate, and is not completely new, as we might think of it in terms of *śūnyatā*. Clearly for her, all things intertwine, including words, concepts, language, bodies, living things, the breath and so on. It is here where we find common ground in Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji’s thought, and where each can supplement the other. The self we might say is textual, and genre or sexuation are the ways to cultivate it. However, to secure this non-essentialist

understanding, I think we need to forge two standpoints on the non-dual field of *śūnyatā*. It is a foregrounding of Nishitani Keiji's self-understanding on the field of *śūnyatā* which we must now turn.

2.5.b. śūnyatā and self-understanding

For Nishitani Keiji, religion 'has to do with life itself' (RN, 2). It is not a set of beliefs in another world or a transcendent God, nor mere rituals and rites by which a community is bound together, it is not the study of religions and what they have been historically, nor is it to consider the utility of religion as a moral basis for society. According to Nishitani Keiji, religion has two main facets: it is existential, that is, it is the concern of each individual and their own life, and it is found in the individual's asking of the question 'for what purpose do I exist?' (RN, 2-3). Fundamentally, it is an individual quest for meaning and purpose in life and must be approached as a living question. This is captured in the term self-awareness of reality, which means 'both our becoming aware of reality and, at the same time, the reality realizing itself in our awareness' (RN, 5). It is this realization of ourselves, and at the same time reality, which is nothing more than reality itself realising itself through us that is the aim and purpose of our lives. The main point for us here is that religion according to Nishitani Keiji is an existential quest of each individual, which requires a break through by each of us, through the questioning of one's purpose here in our own life. Religion then is the pursuit of each individual for self-realisation and in many respects, philosophy is a tool of the religious way of life. We can see then that Zen philosophical hermeneutics is an appropriate name for this religious

quest for the self.[34]

The self is the main thrust of Nishitani Keiji's life's work, it is the focus point of his philosophical inquiries, and it is the place in which all these inquiries entwine, seen no more so than in the existential religious quest. For him, the self itself, must become a question (Parkes, 1990, 198). But what does he mean by the terms self, subject and subjectivity? Although his schematic for understanding the self changes over time, there are three basic pillars which can help us to orientate ourselves here. There is the Western self as ego found in Descartes. There is the self as intersubjective, found in the Japanese term *ningen* (人間). And, there is the perspective of the Buddhist understanding of self as non-self or non-ego (Van Bragt, 1983, 300), which for Nishitani Keiji is understood as the interpenetrational self, Muga (無我).

First, there is the Western view of self, which for him in it modern day form, is based on a Cartesian view of self as ego. Nishitani Keiji sees the dominant perspective of the self in the West to be Cartesian in essence. He maintains this throughout his lifelong study. For him, the 'self of contemporary man is an ego of the Cartesian type, constituted self-consciously as something

[34] Unno (1989, 315) points out that Nishitani Keiji's thought is a modern hermeneutic of Zen Buddhism, but he is not using that in the same sense as I mean here. It is not merely a modern interpretation of Zen Buddhist thought through the lens of Western philosophy; it is a philosophical hermeneutic in the Gadamerian sense, that is, a hermeneutic of self-understanding.

standing over against the world and all the things that are in it' (RN, 13). When Nishitani Keiji uses the term subject, he does so in this Cartesian sense (Van Bragt, 1983, 300). A subject is an ego, set against a world of objects. For him, as we shall see, this Western philosophical concept of self understood as ego or subject, leads to an alienated subject and its culture of nihilism.[35]

The second term used for self-understanding and which we should grasp here in a preliminary way is human existence or *ningen* (人間). *Ningen* is an interesting concept which was first elucidated philosophically by Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960). *Ningen* is the Japanese term used for human being, mankind, or person. In Japanese philosophy Watsuji Tetsurō gave more weight to *ningen* as a philosophical concept in his *Rinrigaku* (translated literally as the principles that allow us to live in friendly community) originally published in 1937. He used the term to define a human being as fundamentally relational or intersubjective; as opposed to being an autonomous, or separate self.[36] Crucial to his understanding was the etymological interpretation of the two characters

[35] We can of course question this claim that all Western views of the self are Cartesian. There are many other conceptualisations of self which differ to the ego and the subject as found in Descartes; whether the Freudian ego, or the subject of woman in feminist thought for example. The main point that Nishitani Keiji would stress is the fundamental duality at the root of all of these self-concepts. That is, there is always a subject set against a world of objects. The exact formulation of this may differ, but at the most primordial level, the self in Western thought is, with very few exceptions, one based on some form of dualism. This is Nishitani Keiji's claim at the most general level and it is a difficult one for us to deny.

[36] Robert E. Carter (2001, 126) analyses three meanings of *Ningen*: 1) Human being as individual; 2) Human being as enmeshed in relationships; 3) The space between in which relationships occur.

of 人 (*nin*) and 間 (*gen*). The first character 人 (*nin*) is usually translated as person, while the second character 間 (*gen*) is translated as space or between.

Watsuji Tetsurō analyses that a person is always both an individual and a social being which is captured by the term *nin*. In order to be defined as an individual we must negate the social and in order to be a social being we must negate the individual. This means that in essence the human being is in fact always between the individual and social. For Watsuji Tetsurō*:*

> '*Ningen* is the public and, at the same time, the individual human beings living within it. Therefore, it refers not merely to an individual "human being" nor merely to "society." What is recognizable here is a dialectical unity of those double characteristics that are inherent in a human being' (RR, 15)

This analysis was in fact similar to what Nishida Kitarō called identity of self-contradiction. That whichever form of analysis we choose to take we must negate one side of the human being's contradictory totality of the individual and the social. This contradictory totality is the true nature of human beings (Carter,

2001, 126-127).[37] We need to bear this in mind then when we consider that for Nishitani Keiji human existence on its basic level is a contradiction between the individual and the social, where one must be negated for us to arrive at a definition of the other. And, to take one of these as more fundamental and then analyse the human being from that perspective would be to take up a limited and abstract perspective. Instead what we must try to do is hold them both together at the same time, that is, to stand as the paradox between them.

The second term, *gen*, is even more interesting for us here. Watsuji Tetsurō in his etymological analysis traces the term *gen* which means betweenness to an earlier term *aida* or *aidagara* which means place or location. The shift of focus here then is that a person always exists in a place or space in and with, or between other people (Carter, 2001, 126).[38] It gives the human being(s) a simultaneous singularity-plurality and location-spatiality. It was the stressing of this spatiality of a person(s) which he believed addressed a prejudice for temporality in the Western philosophical tradition, as well as a tendency towards individualism (Carter, 1996, 5).

The concept of *ningen* has in fact been used already in the most

[37] For an excellent and simple overview of Nishida's almost impenetrable thought see chapter six of Robert E. Carter's *Encounter with Enlightenment (2001)*. For Nishitani Keiji's perspective see the excellent collection of essays on his teacher's thought entitled *Nishida Kitarō (1991)*.

[38] For an excellent overview of Watsuji Tetsurō's philosophy see Carter, R. and McCarthy, E. (2017)

significant comparative work between Luce Irigaray and non-European philosophy in Erin McCarthy's *Ethics Embodied (2010)*. McCarthy establishes a feminist comparative ethics which she calls an embodied ethics by linking together the phenomenological tradition and the idea of an embodied selfhood Martin Heidegger, Watsuji Tetsurō and another Japanese philosopher Yasuo Yuasa (1925-2005). She also establishes links between the relational quality of care ethics found in feminists such as Carol Gilligan to the relational quality of human existence found in Martin Heidegger and Watsuji Tetsurō. Ultimately, she brings together Luce Irigaray and Watsuji Tetsurō to establish a concept of *ningen* which is no longer sex neutral. She does so through their shared intimacy orientation, which in this case is a reliance on a relational embodied selfhood as essential for establishing a sexed care ethics. It is an excellent study which paves the way for my own.

The point we need to make here is that Nishitani Keiji uses this same term *ningen* when he discusses the human being in his works. He does so according to Carter, in approximately the same manner that Watsuji Tetsurō does (Carter, 2006, 16).[39] For my purposes, it is firstly important to note that both Nishitani Keiji and Watsuji Tetsurō's use of *ningen*, if we are at our most generous, is at best sex neutral. Much as McCarthy's attempt to blend sexuate difference and *ningen* through education is admirable, my aim here is to follow Nishitani Keiji's thought on the no-self, and whether it is possible to replace that

[39] See page sixteen of his introduction to the translation of a series of six Nishitani Keiji lectures entitled *On Buddhism (2006)*. Lectures four and five are the most revealing where we can see clearly the basic agreement between Nishitani Keiji and Watsuji Tetsurō.

with an understanding of sexuate difference as non-he and non-she instead.[40]

Nishitani Keiji's final understanding of the self is the Buddhist view of self. When Nishitani Keiji uses the term self, it is usually this he means (Van Bragt, 1983, 300). This takes on a number of different guises depending on the relational quality which is present. For example, there is the relation of self and things which is for him *Muga* (無我) or that each and every thing, self and all, is empty of any inherent existence. There is explained by the circuminsessional self (*egoteki*) which means that self and all things interpenetrate each other with neither self nor thing having independent existence, while paradoxically, each and everything is only truly itself when it is realised to exist in this way. There is the non-ego and the true-self, understood in the classical sense of *anātman*. That is that the self itself, has no substantial or permanent existence such as an unchanging soul. And there is the self as true-self or the self in its suchness (*tathātā*) which tends to designate the quality of the self when it has undergone a non-dual realisation, in other words, that it and each every other and all things are now manifest in their suchness or thusness, a way of expressing the true quality of each self and/or a things existence (Van Bragt, 1983, 304).[41]

[40] McCarthy (2014) does tackle the problem of non-dual subjectivity in relation to intersubjectivity and fluid relations.

[41] The number of different terms and the inevitable loss of style and meaning found in translation make it especially hard at times for us to keep up with the exact meaning and terminology that Nishitani Keiji is using in reference to the non-self.

There is one final term which we must address here and that is subjectivity. Subjectivity for Nishitani Keiji is freedom. It is the standpoint that arises in the thought of Kierkegaard, it is where man thinks with passion 'in which one strives resolutely to be oneself and to seek the ground of one's actual existence' (SN, 2). Secondly, it is subjective in the sense that the self can never be an object. That as subjectivity we can never be reduced to the objective. This is first felt positively when we break through onto the field of nihility:

> 'to feel this nihility underfoot is to break through the existence of things all at once, to pass beyond that dimension in which each and every thing in the world is thought to have an objective existence, and to recover for man a standpoint of subjectivity that can never be reduced to mere objective existence' (RN, 54)

However, this does not mean subjective as in reduced to our own private little world (Van Bragt, 1983, 304). Finally, subjectivity is freedom. It is the realisation of the non-self in the sphere of subject-object, where a standpoint arises that cannot be reduced to an object, and where the self that comes to realise its actual existence as absolutely free. Subjectivity, like self therefore, can be seen from different perspectives. In essence, true subjectivity is the same as non-self or non-ego (OB, 87-88). It is a self that interpenetrates all things and which all things interpenetrate, and owing to this, it is absolutely

free from all attachments.

In this thesis I follow the basic rule that subject and ego are the Western views of self as found on a dualistic field of subject and object. Non-self, is a self which is no longer bound to the dualistic world of subject and object. For the sake of simplicity, I follow Stambaugh (1999) and Unno (1989), by positing Nishitani Keiji's most fundamental view of non-self as that of the interpenetrational self (*muga* 無我).

The term *śūnyatā* is taken from the *Mahāyāna* (great vehicle) later school of Buddhist thought which developed out of *Theravāda* (the elder school or lesser vehicle.) It is estimated to have emerged from Northern India circa 1st Century B.C. to 2nd Century C.E. The Tibetan, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Japanese traditions of Buddhist thought are primarily considered to be part of the broad geographical-cultural movement of the *Mahāyāna*. It should be noted that the *Mahāyāna* is not a school of Buddhism as such but rather an overarching name for a movement consisting in a variety of schools and traditions which developed somewhat later than the *Theravāda* and in culturally diverse and various geographical regions of South, Central and East Asia.

The first use of *śūnyatā* by Nishitani Keiji takes place in his early work

The Self-overcoming of nihilism [1949] and is used in relation to nihilism.[42] Here at the end of his analysis of nihilism in Western thought and culture he addresses the meaning of nihilism for Japan, and the relation of Buddhism to nihilism. He states that, 'there is in *mahāyāna* a standpoint that cannot be reached even by nihilism that overcomes nihilism, even though this latter may tend in that direction' (SN, 180). After he advocates the *mahāyāna* standpoint, he goes on to quote *Nāgārjuna*'s fundamental treatise on the middle way (*mūlamadhyamakakārikā) 'by* virtue of emptiness everything is able to arise, but without emptiness nothing whatsoever can arise' (SN, 180). *Nāgārjuna* is estimated to have lived in the second Century C.E. The *mādhyamika* school, is said to originate with him, and is named after his principal work the *mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. It is in this work that he formulates the most profound thought of the *mahāyāna*, that is *śūnyatā*. This work is generally translated as the treatise on the "middle way". The middle way stands for the way of thinking between the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism (Gethin, 1998. 237-238), in Nishitani Keiji's Western philosophical terms, between the extremes of nihilism and absolutism (Davis, 2017, SEP).

Fundamentally, the mādhyamika concept of *śūnyatā* is a reinterpretion of the Buddha's word regarding the true interdependent nature of all beings and phenomena. Without wanting to complicate things (as there are further developments of this thought within the Buddhist tradition) it would

[42] First published in Japanese as nihirizumu (1949) [SN]. Literally this should be translated as nihilism.

be easiest to say *śūnyatā* is usually understood as 'the direct realisation of the absence of inherent existence of all phenomenon' (Geshe Tashi Tsering (2005, 112).[43] This must be clarified, by saying that it does not mean that nothing exists, as Davis (2017, SEP) states, 'it is not a vacuum of relative nothingness … it is an open clearing wherein beings are neither nullified nor reified'. It is not nihilism, as this would be one of the extreme views and non-existence is itself refuted by the concept of *śūnyatā*.[44] As Nishitani Keiji himself states:

> '*śūnyatā* is the point at which we become manifest in our own suchness as concrete human beings, as individuals with both body and personality. And at the same time, it is the point at which everything around us becomes manifest in its own suchness' (RN, 90)

What this means is that nothing exists as it appears to – in the sense of a self-originating separate phenomenon – everything is dependent on causes and conditions, and all phenomena, including most importantly the self as non-self is empty of inherent existence: what we have is an interdependent web of phenomena sustaining any sense of a permanent existence, originally understood as co-dependent origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*).[45]

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[43] See also Davis (2017, SEP)

[44] See also Davis (2013, 206)

[45] The Buddha's teaching of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (Sanskrit) *paticcasammupadda* (Pali) as Rhys Davids explains is 'that all dhamma (phenomena physical and mental) are *paticcasamuppanna* (happen by way of cause)' Rhy Davids (2009, 1) In co-dependent origination, we see the ten causal conditions of phenomena that are the cause of suffering:

For Nishitani Keiji, a non-dual subjectivity is a subjectivity no longer bound by the primary distinctions of inner and outer, subject and object, self and other, and therefore, no longer having a felt sense of isolation and separation from the world. For the self that realises itself on the field of *śūnyatā* it is impossible for it to be ego self-centred, in fact, 'the absolute negation of that very self-centredness enables the field of *śūnyatā* to open up in the first place' (RN, 158). By negating our false view of ourselves completely we find ourselves no longer ego self-centred but literally at the absolute centre. This is because our own home ground is settled in what he calls the 'middle' (Davis, 2017, SEP). We are interpenetrated along with all things, therefore, 'on the field of *śūnyatā,* the centre is everywhere' (RN, 158). Here we have a modern existential philosophical exegesis of the middle way.

The field of *śūnyatā* is where we exist from the standpoint of *muga* in Nishitani Keiji's thought. His thought does not remain with classical Buddhism, because he makes it a modern day hermeneutic in relation to Western philosophy, which has passed through the fire of nihilism (Davis, 2017; Ueda, 2011). In this thesis I take *śūnyatā* to mean Nishitani Keiji's highest stage of

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'Thus then is it, Ananda, that cognition, with name-and-form as its cause; name-and-form, with cognition as its cause ; contact, with name-and-form as its cause; sensation with contact as its cause ; craving, with sensation as its cause; grasping, with craving as its cause ; becoming, with grasping as its cause; birth, with becoming as its cause; old age and death, with birth as its cause; grief, lamentation, ill, sorrow and despair, all come into being' *mahanidana-suttanta* (Rhys Davids, 2009)

self-understanding. Here we should recall one final point, that *śūnyatā* is a realisation which results in a standpoint from where we can see reality and ourselves simultaneously for the first time. In fact, it is reality that sees itself for the first time through this standpoint which is non-dual, as Heisig explains,

> 'the standpoint of emptiness, then, is not so much a philosophical "position" as it is the achievement of an original self-awareness (our self-nature), compared to which all other consciousness is caught in the fictional darkness of ignorance, or what the Buddhists call avidya. It is a point from which to philosophize, not a doctrine' (Heisig 2001, 223)

Śūnyatā, therefore is not a doctrine but a field on which we can take a standpoint. If *śūnyatā* is the field of interpenetration, then the no-self is the new standpoint from where we can philosophize.

My own view of the self is based on joining Nishitani Keiji's understanding based on the self as interpenetrational (*muga* 無我) and on the field of *śūnyatā*, with the sexed nature of the self as sexuate found in Luce Irigaray. Joining together their own terminology we can say that the I-he and I-she as two standpoints on the field of sexuate difference, can be expanded to two standpoints of non-he and non-she on the field of *śūnyatā*. I want to

suggest that we need to hold these two standpoints simultaneously, that the self is ultimately empty of any inherent existence; but relatively, as breathing-living-speaking bodies, it is sexuate all the way down. That in our relation to all things we exist on the field of *śūnyatā*, but we relate fundamentally as two subjects who are different, we are always within a standpoint of either I-he or I-she. Therefore, when if we realise we are on a field of interpenetrating existence (*śūnyatā*) we must explore the possibility of two subjects as I-he and I-she as non-he and non-she.

3

The Problem of Nihilism

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to juxtapose Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray's thoughts on nihilism. I shall begin by analysing Nishitani Keiji's more negative view of the East-West dialogue found in his later writings; before going on to examine his philosophical understanding of the self, and the cause of cultural nihilism, as a self-consciousness suspended over nihility. (This can be understood as a philosophy of the subject based on a self-(mis)understanding which leads us to a global cultural nihilism.)

In the second part of the chapter, I shall argue that Luce Irigaray's fundamental concern is also nihilism; a position I was able to understand owing to my parallel reading of the her alongside Nishitani Keiji. By examining Luce Irigaray's writings on Freud and Antigone, I shall demonstrate that for her the subject falls into nihilism because of a fundamental domination caused by the male subject's need to objectify the external world and constitute himself as a

subject.

In this chapter, I shall argue that Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji are fundamentally in agreement; nihilism is the most important problem for us today,[46] and an isolated self-centred subject inevitably falls into nihilism. It will also be shown that there is an important difference between Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji when it comes to the ultimate cause of nihilism. For Luce Irigaray, it is a masculine (neutral) subject who falls into nihilism, whereas a female subject has not yet been able to establish herself in her own right as a subject, owing to her position as an object for men. Nishitani Keiji's understanding of nihilism is potentially one appropriate for men therefore, but perhaps questionable for women, if we take into consideration Luce Irigaray's perspective.

My aim then is to avoid the danger of falling into a nihilism of the same by positing a standpoint for man and woman on the field of *śūnyatā*. This I call the non-he and non-she. In this chapter we shall see that men and women are both objectified, that men and women must both be established as subjects on the field of consciousness as the I-he and I-she, but that we must do this without falling into an essentialism, and the way to do this is by breaking through the

[46] Here we see the influence of both Niezsche and Heidegger. This history of Western culture and philosophy as inherently nihilistic or driven by the motor of nihilism is an assumption that both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray make. It is questionable as to whether this is in fact the case. For a discussion of Luce Irigaray's nihilism in relation to Heidegger and Nietzsche, See Mortensen (1994). Much of the scholarship on Nishitani Keiji focuses on his relation to Nietzsche and nihilism, two very good examples we can cite here are: Parkes (1997) and Davis (2011).

field of self-consciousness of I-he and I-she, on to the field of *śūnyatā* as non-he and non-she. In this chapter, I focus on the problem, and in the next three chapters I focus is on overcoming this problem.

3.2. Nishitani Keiji and the problem of Nihilism

So far in Nishitani Keiji's thought, we have seen an optimistic view of the development of the East-West discourse into a global dialogue, which attempts to check the Euro-centric prejudice of the philosophical tradition and tackle the emerging global problems which are rooted in their European origins. Most of this was drawn from writings before 1966. Here we shall examine how Nishitani Keiji proceeds more pessimistically and negatively through the East-West dialogue, and into the discussion of no religion in the contemporary age. Let me give a short description of Nishitani Keiji's position on East and West in one of his writings some twenty years later:

> 'People from foreign countries who were traditionally considered belonging to the "outside", strangers of a different cultural background, are no longer considered "other". Very gradually they have become part of the "inside", and are not foreign or strange any longer. This, I think, is a very important characteristic of the contemporary world. The stage of the contemporary world is different from all the earlier stages of human history, East and West are no longer facing each other as mutually "outside" phenomena, but they have become one

> "inside" unity. Gradually the consciousness that the world is one whole has come to develop' (TW, 119)

In Japanese these two ideas of 'West' and 'East' are literally identical with the word 'Atlantic Ocean' (西洋) and 'Pacific Ocean' (東洋) respectively (TW, 119). They had the connotation of being vast open spaces, Europe belonging to one, and China, Korea, Japan to the other (TW, 119). These vast spacious image-words represent to consciousness a difference which for Nishitani Keiji has now merged into one vast ocean (TW, 120). What is coming into existence now is a single world with a shared understanding that this world is one or becoming one.

The problem for him is not the global consciousness *per se*, but the style of this global consciousness: Western style. He quips that Japanese people all dress in the Western style, which was unthinkable only a few decades ago. In fact, he is suggesting that what is occurring is a "totalizing of the Western style":

> 'One may even say that the purely "Eastern" does not exist anymore. From beginning to end he is embedded in Western style. Take me as an example. I am a Japanese as a person, and yet the things I wear, the things I eat, the things I drink, etc. they are all Western in style' (TW, 120)

The East (Japan/Far East) is being subsumed under the West – subtly stated here as 'style'. The two oceans which are becoming one do so as a Western Ocean and this is unprecedented, 'it is only in the contemporary world that the world is for the first time truly becoming one. This means a great change' (TW, 120). This great change for Nishitani Keiji – as he states almost directly after this – is 'essentially related to the problem of nihilism' (TW, 120).[47] Nishitani Keiji characterises this age as an age of no religion, but we should be clear that this is not to say an age of atheism (*See* ENR). Atheism is bound up with theism and is therefore, still within the field of religious thinking (ENR; RN xlviii). "No religion" for Nishitani Keiji is a world without existential inquiry and the liberation of subjectivity that comes with it, and a world without values, and the ethical pathways that religions often safeguarded:

> 'Until now the standard of values, the ultimate foundation of all principles has rested in God – or Buddha, maybe. Nowadays, the ultimate foundation of all value standards has become fragile, a situation which we describe as nihilism and which is really the most fundamental problem of our age' (TW, 121)

It is the world where there is no religious existential quest that he is

[47] A large proportion of the small amount of scholarly literature on Nishitani Keiji is focused on either nihilism and/or science and technology. Hase Shoto (1997; 1999) suggests that later Nishitani Keiji is no longer focused on nihilism but rather science and technology. The focus on nihilism is explicit in the middle period of Nishitani Keiji's work (see above), but it is still very much implicit in later works which are more focused on science and technology. The end of *On Buddhism* [1970's] for example returns to the problem of nihilism, as do essays such as 'Encountering no-religion' (1985) and 'Three Worlds – No Dharma' (1986).

speaking of here. Religion had previously in all periods of human history been fundamental to the integration of individuals and the ordering of human relations with nature, each other and the divine. It was crucial for the self to come to know itself not theoretically (philosophy) but, actually (existential religious quest). For Nishitani Keiji, religion preserved the path for existential inquiry and ethical values (Davis, 2017, SEP). Our current age is instead an epoch dominated by science and technology, two entwined discourses that do not include an overarching ethical world view according to which relations are ordered:

> 'The whole world is rapidly becoming one world. Today in almost all fields of human life, in industrial, economical and political activities, and in the arts, morality and philosophy, the one world is more and more emerging as the stage of their plays. There is no need to speak in this regard of science and technology. Their new inventions are making communication easier and speedier between distant parts of the globe. They are bringing at the same time, by their essential character of "objectivity," the minds of all peoples on to a common plane of thought and intention. They are the main actors in the drama of the emergence of the one world, necessitating the encounter of various cultures and religions' (RTA, 147)

Nishitani Keiji sees that the whole world is becoming one world unified in one style, a Western style. This reduction to a single style is also a reduction

to a single form of self (the Cartesian self) which is fundamental to the "objectivity" of science and technology (RN; SZ; OB; Hase, 1997). Science and technology, for him, are complicit in the furthering of the nihilistic attitude; our bodies, ourselves, are all becoming the same, we are being ordered and reduced into an objectified existence (ENR; RR). As Waldenfels (1980, 2) writes, 'a one dimensional view of man presents a distortion of humanity.'[48] For Nishitani Keiji, mankind and the 'fragile' fabric of human relations are being mechanized (RR, 61). It is this distorted view of humanity that is Nishitani Keiji's own struggle, 'minds are being mechanized like never before, everything has become solely mechanical' (ENR, 143) or as he states elsewhere:

> 'The situation in question may be called a tendency toward the total mechanization of human life. What I mean by this is, first of all, that the world comes to be understood mechanically, and secondly, that human social relations, namely person-to-person relationships, and even the way of thinking, or the human mind and spirit, come gradually to be mechanized' (PM, 51)

The greatest danger here is that a mind mechanized and reduced to the same as every other mind cannot even see its own mechanization. We are accustomed to interpreting our world in a mechanized manner, to think in a mechanized way, and to see only the same thing all around us. We are unaware

[48] Here of course he is using the term taken from another student of Martin Heidegger: Herbert Marcuse and the title of his well-known work *One dimensional man (1964).*

of our own alienation from ourselves as we accept ourselves as subjects set against and separate from a world of objects. We come to see ourselves, things and others as objects too. We are reduced to the field of objectivity, but as we saw earlier, for him an existential subjectivity, that is we ourselves, cannot be reduced to mere objects. The emergence of a single world which is mechanized and objectified, furthers the history of a nihilistic Western thought with its unconscious trajectory set to global nihilism. It is the ultimate cause of the problem of nihilism for Nishitani Keiji, and its root lies in alienation caused by a mistaken self-understanding which we must address next.

3.3. Nishitani Keiji and the alienation of self

Nishitani Keiji gives a diagnosis of our times as nihilistic. He approaches the problem of nihilism from a number of different angles and offers several different definitions and analyses. Nihilism here is broadly understood as one or more of the following: a philosophical position which is ultimately based on relative nothingness (nihility), a loss of shared values, or an excessive ego-centredness which leads to our self-isolation. Here we will examine in detail Nishitani Keiji's claim that it is owing to the inherent self-centredness of self-consciousness that we fall into a nihility of self and things which leads ultimately to an all pervasive nihilism because we fail to pass through that field of nihility onto the non-dual field of *śūnyatā*.

The standpoint of self-consciousness is inherently dualistic when seen

from upon the field of consciousness, and the standpoint is a void when seen from upon the field of nihility. Only on the field of *śūnyatā* can either of these perspectives (dualism or relative nothingness) be overcome, and along with it the alienation of the subject who stands on either of these fields. I shall focus on this analysis, because this form of misunderstanding of the self, according to Nishitani Keiji, takes place because of a prejudice inherent to the mode of self-consciousness; we fall into a nihilistic understanding of ourselves because self-consciousness falls into an excessive self-centredness, what we might call an ego-centred view of the world i.e. a dualistic interpretation of life. This is in fact, what Luce Irigaray calls egological (BEW, 21). For Nishitani Keiji, excessive self-centredness is the root cause of all other forms of nihilism: a loss of shared values, a failure to deal with our own little death, a philosophical position based on the ego or the relative nothingness of existence.

We must begin then with his understanding of the self and its relations. For him the self in relation to things has three possible modes, which we can preview here before going into more detail.[49] The first mode of self is self-consciousness. It is in brief, that we know ourselves and things on a field which is fundamentally divided in two as internal and external, subject and objects, i.e., it is a dualist view of the world. The second "is" nihility; a relative nothingness of which all phenomena, including self-consciousness, are subject to, and which therefore undermines this internal and external division with a despairing nothingness or abyss. The third "is" *śūnyatā*, a non-dual and

[49] I am indebted to Graham Parkes for this threefold understanding of Nishitani Keiji and build on it throughout this section. See Parkes (2014).

unifying simultaneous experience of self and all things; a self-negation that includes and preserves the other two limited modes of self-consciousness and nihility through a double exposure of them (Parkes, 2014). These three modes are not in any way hierarchical, they are the essential fields on which we might find ourselves; as fields on which we stand, they frame the world on which we know ourselves and the world around us. In other words, they provide the limits of our hermeneutic horizon.

Nishitani Keiji states in the opening chapter of *Religion and Nothingness (1983)* that:

> 'when we think of "reality" from an everyday standpoint, we think first of all of the things and events *without* us: the mountains and streams, the flowers and forests, and the entire visible universe all about us … Next, we think of reality as the world *within* us: our thoughts, our feelings, and our desires' (RN, 6)

For him, we naturally see our world as divided between external and internal, as that which is without us and that which is within us. Our everyday experience of being a self in the world is demarcated into two: one concerning external phenomena, and one concerning internal phenomena. We are constituted by our separation from the world around us. The objects around us are not us, we are something other, and this is our internal world. Self-

consciousness then is our most ordinary mode of the self, it is not a special phenomenon, but rather goes hand-in-hand with that every day, unexamined or ordinary way of viewing the world around us as a division between me and the world of things outside. A human being, on the level of self-consciousness, sees the world naturally according to an internal/external division:

> 'to look at things from the standpoint of the self [on the level of self-consciousness] is always to see things merely as objects, that is, to look at things without from a field [of consciousness] within the self' (RN, 9).

The human being on the level of self-consciousness is for Nishitani Keiji our usual way of self-understanding. He writes, 'when we speak of the self, usually we mean the self which is conscious of or has come to reflect on itself. This self has "self-consciousness" as its essence, and never parts from it' (STZ, 1). This very ordinary way of seeing the world then, is due to the fact that we are self-conscious beings with a mind composed of sensations and intellect; who discriminate between internal and external, subject and object, and ultimately, self and other(s). In short, "Man"[50] is self-conscious because he/she 'knows himself [or herself] at the same time as he [or she] knows things' (STZ, 16). This, for Nishitani Keiji, is a self which sees itself and the world around it on the field

[50] We must remember that this is human existence, or *ningen* as discussed above.

of consciousness.[51]

The separation between internal and external is necessary therefore, if we are seeing and thinking from the field of consciousness, as he states: '[The] standpoint of separation of subject and object, of opposition between within and without, is what we call the field of consciousness' (RN, 9). Field (*J. ba*) we can recall here is a spatial-concept on which we stand or take a standpoint (*J. tachiba*). 'Field of consciousness', therefore, gives a spatial and not only temporal sense to consciousness, as well as giving the term a sharable sense, i.e., we all as human beings see things from the standpoint of a self-conscious self, which is due to that fact that we all stand on a field of consciousness. Self-consciousness then, is our ordinary place from where human beings share in seeing the world. We are all bound up together by the same way of seeing on the field of consciousness. This is the horizon or the frame from which we look. The problem is 'the unquestioned assumption … that this is the only proper mode of thinking that there is no other' (Unno, 1989, 308). As we shall see, it is feasible that we could conceptualise ourselves in other ways.

There is then within the structure of the field of consciousness, and our self-consciousness which is constituted simultaneously with it, a basic problem which leads to a Cartesian like position (RN; STZ). This position is one where the self is taken as self-evident, as an ego who is certain, and from which the

[51] The spatial-concept field is also employed for nihility and *śūnyatā*.

world of objects or things can then be verified as extended in space outside of the self as ego. This is essentially a misunderstanding, or a limitation to ourselves and things as only understandable on the dualistic field of consciousness. Nishitani Keiji calls this the ordinary way of seeing the world and it has a major problem: the self as self-consciousness can only see the world from its own self-centred position. For Nishitani Keiji:

> 'the self becomes that which possesses these faculties. And since all things in the world, including human beings, are known only via the self's sensations and intellect, the self [as a self-consciousness] is the vantage point from which all things come to be seen. In this sense, the self takes on the appearance of always being located at the center of everything' (STZ 13)

This means that 'it is not possible really to get in touch with things as they are' because that 'self [as self-consciousness] always occupies centre stage' (RN, 9). With these roots in an ordinary way of seeing, a self as self-consciousness:

> 'clearly discriminates one thing from another, and his self from all other living things. Self and external world, subject and object, are divided, and man views the world of objects from the self-centred vantage point of the subject' (STZ, 16-17)

The self on the level of self-consciousness is the vantage point from which all things are seen:

> 'the self [as self-consciousness] sees and grasps the self [from its three possibilities] placing itself at the centre, opposite all other things. This is the self's self-centred mode of being and way of seeing' (STZ, 13)

This is what Nishitani Keiji calls the self-centredness of self-consciousness, and it means that as human beings who are self-conscious we have fallen into a self-centred mode of seeing ourselves and the world of things about us. A human being as self-consciousness therefore, separates itself from all things, this is our inherent prejudice on the field of consciousness. This self-consciousness, at the centre of a world of objects discriminated from it, places itself in 'a position vis-a-vis things from which self and things remain fundamentally separated from one another' (RN, 9). This self-consciousness comes to be completely separated from the world around it and sees itself as the centre of the world. Man now 'exists as if he had no essential connection with other things in the world, as if he were removed from the sphere of the world, and he grasps himself by himself' (STZ, 17). The result is:

> 'The self that is self-centred in relation to the *without* is a self that is separated from things and closed up *within* itself alone. It is a self that continually faces itself in the same way. That is, the self is set ever against itself as some *thing* called "self" and separated from other things. This is the self of self-consciousness' (RN, 10)

What has occurred here then is a shift from the world understood as internal and external, and from which we can understand ourselves in relation to the world of things and objects, to a world of self-isolation of the ego, owing to an inherent prejudice in seeing ourselves as self-evident and separate from the things of the world outside us. However, it:

> 'is by no means self-evident. Indeed it stems from a bias rooted deep within the self-consciousness of man. More fundamentally, the ego-centred grasp and interpretation of ego which we find in modern man is no less of a bias and hardly as self-evident as it is assumed to be. These biases signal a confinement of self-being to the perspective of self-immanence from which man prehends his own egoity and personality, a confinement that inevitably ushers in a narcissistic mode of grasping the self wherein the self gets caught up in itself' (RN, 69)

In this section I have tried to avoid analysing the historical trajectory towards a greater and greater self-centredness, or a more and more refined

distinction of subject and object, or a more and more dualistic enframing of the world, but this is clearly what Nishitani Keiji has in mind when he gives his diagnosis of our contemporary situation which progresses from a modern Cartesian philosophical understanding of statements, but for him there has been a general trend towards a greater and greater individualism, and a more and more self-centred attitude to life – caused by a prejudice inherent to self-consciousness, and a refining of the distinction between a subject and an object in Modern man. He gives the examples of modern science and modern philosophy, (See RN essay I and STZ) as well as psychology and literature, (See STZ part I) as proof of both the reification of self-consciousness, and its inherent self-centredness, which becomes more and more profound in Modern man. We only need to note that his standpoint is persuasive and based on his own experience.

In brief, what we have been speaking about is the inevitable existential alienation of the self, owing to the fact that human beings are defined in a limited way by their self-consciousness which takes place on a field of consciousness which sees the world as inherently dualistic (meaning that of course they see themselves in this way because there is no other way if we remain on this field.) This results in two nihilistic tendencies: a prejudice towards the subject or the ego in isolation, and/or the objectification and mechanization of the living world outside and the subject or ego himself. For Nishitani Keiji, however, the self is not limited to the field of consciousness but has two further possibilities founded on the field of nihility and the field of *śūnyatā*. Next I shall elucidate what he exactly means by nihility as it pertains

to the self, and its self-misunderstanding on the field of self-consciousness, and the resulting cultural nihilism which such a shared limited understanding of self-centredness perpetuates.

Folded beneath this facade of self-consciousness is its double, the field of nihility: a relative nothingness which negates all phenomena posited in a dualistic manner which is as we have seen constitutive of the field of consciousness. If the mode of self-consciousness is the making of distinctions based on divisions such as subject and object, internal and external, within and without, which lead to a reified and alienated view of the self on a dualistic field; then the mode of nihility is the inevitable annihilation of those distinctions, a reduction of everything to the same, a slipping into blind nothingness or non-differentiation. In short, a de-reification of self and all things into non-substantiality, by removing the dualistic framework through a glimpse of its underbelly of relative nothingness. What we have seen in the previous section is in fact already a slipping into nihility of modern man. Nishitani Keiji claims that the diremption of self and things takes place because of an excessive sense of self-consciousness on the field of consciousness. Self-consciousness becomes separate from the world around it and is presumed to be self-evident or self-subsistent, and ultimately each self on the mode of self-consciousness is radically separated from the world of things and an 'other'.[52] This radical separation by an abyss is a defining factor of nihility and a primary cause of nihilism.

[52] This will be dealt with in the following sections and the final chapter.

Nishitani Keiji defines nihility as that which, 'renders meaningless the meaning of life' (RN, 4), while Parkes and Aihara define it as, 'one of the various "grades" or aspects of "nothing" … It means literally "hollow [kyo] nothingness [mu]," generally with a negative connotation' (Parkes, 1990, 199). We must remember, that it is fundamentally a negating of all phenomena, hence, the difficulty in saying exactly what it "*is*". We must see it as a dynamic negating quality. Death for example is the negation of life, and this juxtaposition is one which is useful to keep in mind. Nishitani Keiji introduces the idea that nihility lies beneath the field of consciousness:

> 'Normally we proceed through life, on and on with our eye fixed on something or other, always caught up with something within or without ourselves. It is these engagements that prevent the deepening of awareness. They block off the way to an opening up of that horizon on which nihility appears and self-being becomes a question' (RN, 4)

Our existence on the mode of self-consciousness, our everyday life, going here and there, doing this and that, is "always caught up with something within or without ourselves". In other words, our everyday activities splits us between the internal and the external in a very ordinary way, which all takes place on the field of consciousness. It blocks our way to a greater awareness of ourselves, because we are lost in this busyness of everyday life on the horizon of

self-consciousness with all its every day concerns. But when the horizon of nihility:

> 'does open up at the bottom of those engagements that keep life moving continually on and on, something seems to halt and linger before us. This something is the meaninglessness that lies in wait at the bottom of those very engagements that bring meaning to life. This is the point at which that sense of nihility, that sense that "everything is the same" … brings the restless, forward-advancing pace of life to a halt and makes it take a step back' (RN, 4)

In our daily lives we go about our everyday engagements giving little attention to the fundamental questions of life, however, nihility 'shatters the clinging to conventional thinking on the field of consciousness' (Unno, 1989, 309). Nihility is therefore, is an 'antidote' to an unexamined self, because it is the occurrence of something which breaks the sense of self as a nice self-contained separate existence which will go on unchanging on the field of self-consciousness, and which is supported by the everyday activities which provide us all with meaning (or keep us too busy to reflect on their meaning). Nihility makes us stop and question ourselves: who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose of existence? What is the meaning of it all? These questions, for Nishitani Keiji, are absolutely fundamental to our authentic existence, and they mark the opening up of the religious quest which includes, or is even necessary for, his unique form of philosophical thinking (RN, 2-3). To strive for the

fundamental understanding of ourselves and reality, we must become a question to ourselves:

> 'when we become a question to ourselves and when the problem of why we exist arises, this means that nihility has emerged from the ground of our existence and that our very existence has turned into a question mark. The appearance of nihility signals nothing less than that one's awareness of self-existence has penetrated to an extraordinary depth' (RN, 4)

Nihility is therefore not in fact a negative occurrence; rather, it is a necessary one, if we are to break through the sense of self-consciousness as a separate self, and the misunderstanding that this is our only mode of existence.[53] This "deepening of awareness" which effects all aspects of our daily life and our everyday activities, is an essential and defining aspect of Nishitani Keiji's philosophical hermeneutics. The inquiry into a new sense of self, a new self-understanding, becomes the great question of life, which gives life authentic meaning through a deepening of awareness.

We must also remember that nihility and self-consciousness are always

[53] 'to finally free humans from their egoistic obsessions and manipulative objectifications in the experiential "field of being and consciousness," Nishitani argued for the necessity of first stepping back into the field of nihility' (Davis, 2017, SEP)

co-present in our existence as a self, they are not separable. Just as self-consciousness is a defining factor of our human existence, we also cannot escape from nihility:

> 'Even those who claim that things like nihility are not a problem for them will sooner or later be swallowed up by nihility itself. It is already very much there, right under their feet, and by refusing to make it a problem for themselves they only slip deeper into its clutches' (RN, 47)

We can even say that nihility is as much a defining factor of our existence as self-consciousness is; but we cannot say that one is good, while the other is bad. We must say that each has a necessary function in our existence: one positive and one negative. We can see how closely related they are by juxtaposing the two. The field of consciousness is:

> 'The field that lies at the ground of our everyday lives [and it] is the field of an essential separation between self and things, … Within it, reality appears only in the shape of shattered fragments, only in the shape of ineluctable self-contradictions' (RN, 10)

And, on the field of nihility:

> 'the unique existence of all things and multiplicity and differentiation in the world appear on the field of nihility, all things appear isolated from one another by an abyss. Each thing has its being as a one-and-only, a solitariness absolutely shut up within itself' (RN, 145)

An excessively self-centred self-consciousness that falls into a nihility where the self-enclosure of things is absolute (RN, 249). This excessiveness of a self-conscious self which is radically separated from all things, when taken to an extreme, tips over into nihility. The two are in fact, therefore, a hair's breadth apart. Ultimately: 'we call such a state of absolute self-enclosure "nihilistic." In human awareness, this solitariness is expressed as being suspended, all alone, over a limitless void' (RN, 145).

We do well to remember then that nihility is that which 'renders meaningless the meaning of life' (RN, 4). It is most likely that the event which triggers our encounter with nihility will be perceived on the field of consciousness as negative, bad or something to be avoided, something to fear, a lack or a loss. Everything, both internal and external will be nullified, reduced to a void in comparison to how it is for us now on the field of consciousness (RN, 17). Hence our preoccupation with the busyness of everyday life is an attempt to avoid its loss of meaning – it saves us from ourselves.

In our everyday lives, for Nishitani Keiji, what breaks through our isolated self-consciousness tends to be a personal tragedy (RN, 3-4). It could be the death of a loved one, or our own encounter with illness, suffering or death, which brings us to realize that our existence as a self-conscious being is finite: we will die, as must all living beings (SP). And we as human beings defined by our self-consciousness are conscious of the fact of death. It is, in a life where almost everything is changing and uncertain, our one certainty: we shall die, irrespective of our will to live, or our drive for mere survival (Parkes, 2014). Lurking under our everyday busyness – our life on the level of self-consciousness – is this fact of death, and at any moment it may seize us and remove us from this self-consciousness, bringing us face to face on a personal level with the nihility of our existence. In short, we can summarise by saying: if self-consciousness is life, then nihility is death, and these are two sides of the coin of our existence as a self. However, it is not all doom and gloom, we should recall that there is in fact a third side to this coin *śūnyatā,* which is an abyss for the abyss of nihility (RN, 98).

The main point for us to grasp here is that an excessive self-centredness falls into a nihilistic understanding of the world (self and things) as does an excessive nihility. It is therefore, that through its misunderstanding of itself on the two horizons of self-consciousness and nihility, and a misunderstanding of the relation of the fields of self-consciousness and nihility, that the self falls into one of the possible forms of nihilism appropriate for its time. Our time being

one of ego self-centredness, globalization and mechanization combine, for him, in what he calls an age of no-religion, in other words: an age without existential inquiry and a shared system of values which guide that inquiry.

It is important to make one final note here, that an excess of thinking on the side of nihility necessitates a nihilistic philosophical position. At the time in which Nishitani Keiji is writing the contemporary situation of philosophical nihilism can be seen in the philosophies of Nietzsche, Sartre and Heidegger. For Nishitani Keiji they each take a stand on nothingness, and posit freedom on nothingness (SN). With the rise of atheism, he sees nihilism as the limitation of man to the human self-centred position, in brief humanism (SN). Connected to both of these is the loss of shared values brought about through the demise of Christian religion in Europe, or the demise of Buddhism in Japan, what can, in short, be called 'the death of God', that is, the simultaneous loss of self-understanding, shared values, and the will to create new values as diagnosed by Friedrich Nietzsche.[54]

Nihilism as we have seen is intimately linked to religion and is the most fundamental problem for Nishitani Keiji throughout his life. He also makes clear that nihilism is a perennial problem, as it is something which people from all ages and times have struggled with (RN, 168). Most of all, as he points out on the first page of *The Self overcoming of Nihilism* fundamentally, 'if nihilism

[54] This is the subject of his 1949 work published in English as *The Self overcoming of Nihilism (1990)*

is anything, it is first of all a problem of the self' (SN, 1). Above, I have attempted to sketch Nishitani Keiji's existential inquiry into the human condition, and its fall into a nihilistic understanding of itself and the world. This understanding is what I mean by the alienation of the self. It is not alienation in the Marxist sense, but rather alienation in the existential sense. This alienation occurs in two different but related ways, one, through a radical separation of our self from all other things, owing to the inherent self-centred prejudice of self-consciousness we fall into a subjectivism to some degree in all that we do; and two, by the objectification and mechanization of all things, others and oneself as objects.

Nishitani Keiji suggests that the Western approach to overcoming the threat of nihilism is through a specific mode, the desire and freedom of the individual. Although his writings are limited on this, apart from the mechanization of the self and institutions (as seen during his lifetime in communist states) there is another option of filling the void with pleasures and distractions (RN, 87). In its simplest of forms this is a negative nihilism of the masses following trends, fashions, sporting events and any other sweeping distractions. The positive side of this desire orientated subject is a creative existentialism; a positive nihilism that attempts to step away from the degradation of man through mechanization and find freedom in a subjectivity that takes its stand on that very nihility (RN, 88). This is Sartre's position for Nishitani Keiji: a subject is free to choose because he is a subjectivity constituted on nothingness. (We should remember that Sartre was the most popular philosopher in Europe at this time and much of Nishitani Keiji's writings target his thought). However, for Nishitani Keiji although this is a positive movement

away from mechanization and objectification which places our freedom firmly in subjectivity; it still rests on an incomplete self-awareness, it is on a dualistic field suspended over a void, and therefore, still partial in its self-understanding, as well as risking establishing the subject on an ever-changing field of desires which are clearly open to manipulation. This standpoint of the liberal self is one where the freedom of individuals 'is apt to be orientated to the mere freedom of the subject in pursuit of desires' (RN, 87), which risks establishing ourselves on something which is for him very superficial such as fleeting desires (PAZ). This is a pursuit of happiness based on desiring, accumulating and being attached to things and others which for him, is clearly unacceptable and merely perpetuates the inherent duality of consciousness and the nihility the underlies it, rather than actually overcoming it.

In summary then, self-consciousness covers over the mode of self which Nishitani Keiji terms nihility. The field of nihility, lurks within, under, alongside, the field of consciousness.[55] These fields are completely interrelated with our experience and our reality: we experience ourselves as a self-conscious self and we believe our reality is this self-consciousness; contrariwise, we experience ourselves as a nothingness, and we believe that our reality is based on this nothingness giving us a certain freedom based on our subjectivity as nothing. Our experience is usually an admixture of these two fields, but whatever the case, the relationship between them not appropriate for our actual living existence. Put succinctly: the standpoint of self-consciousness has a

[55] 'Spatial' terms cannot adequately explain the relationship between nihility and self-consciousness.

prejudice based on substance and life; and the standpoint of nihility has a prejudice based on insubstantiality, nothingness and death. Ultimately, both standpoints are necessary, but either one taken to its extreme leads to a position we call nihilistic; because they both result eventually in the radical separation of self from the world of things, and the self-misunderstanding that results is either owing to self-enclosure or objectification. However, this does not mean we are looking for a version of the golden mean between the two; rather, what we are looking for is a realisation of *śūnyatā*. We shall look at this position of *śūnyatā* in the following chapters, now let us turn to Luce Irigaray's thoughts on nihilism.

3.4. Luce Irigaray and the problem of nihilism

Luce Irigaray, like Nishitani Keiji, gives the diagnosis that the problem of nihilism in Western culture is caused by a misunderstanding of the self. By reading Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray alongside each other, and through personal discussions with her, I was able to locate this thread of nihilism running through her work. Although she agrees with Nishitani Keiji, that man's inevitable descent into nothingness and nihilism as a loss of values, and an inability to create new values; she locates the cause of man's demise into nothingness in a very different dynamic.

Unlike Nishitani Keiji, who considers man's predicament to be one resulting from a simple mistake of self-consciousness and a misunderstanding

of nihility, Luce Irigaray considers the current situation to be one brought about by man's domination of the natural world on the one hand, and on the other, the confusion of woman with the natural world, especially her capability to reproduce or engender. She comes to this analysis through her engagement with Freud's Little Ernst, her reading of Antigone and her linguistic analysis, which we shall examine in this section. In this section we shall examine her analysis of the problem of man's domination of the world, his relation to objects, and the resulting nihilism which ensues from it. In short, the problem of nihilism in Western (masculine) culture.

The only previous engagement with nihilism in Luce Irigaray's work work is found in Ellen Mortensen's *The Feminine and nihilism (1994)*. Although a useful study this text focuses almost solely on the philosophical heritage of Luce Irigaray (Nietzsche and Heidegger) to locate her work in that history of European nihilism found in these two very significant philosophers. It is necessary to understand these forerunners in the Western tradition who placed the problem of nihilism in Western culture at the forefront of our current epoch's predicament, and who were so influential on Luce Irigaray and her own thought concerning nihilism. But, on the other hand, it is also important for us to look at her later work in relation to the problem of nihilism, and, as I do here, to discuss her cross-cultural encounters in relation to that same problem – two dimensions that so far have not been combined nor received much critical engagement.

In her most recent works, Luce Irigaray has shown a great concern for the problem of nihilism as understood in the Western philosophical tradition. For example, in *In the beginning she was (2012)* she highlights three nihilistic tendencies. First, she locates the origin of nihilism with the pre-socratic philosophers and a process of neutralization, 'with the neutralization of his own being and the whole of the universe, the Presocratic philosopher somehow prepares our tradition for nihilism' (IBSW, 4). Second, she proposes that the reduction of everything to the same, that is, the eradication of difference:

> 'There must no longer be master or slave, rich or poor, white or black, and finally no longer man or woman. This reduction of differences is planned by Western culture, especially through putting into the neuter the ecstasy which took the place of her – nature, woman, Goddess – or of the relation with her. This reduction of differences leads to a cultural deluge, to a nihilism without any possible overcoming, or to an authoritarianism or totalitarianism worse than those already known, notably because they reach the core of thinking itself and claim to be universal' (IBSW, 10)

And finally, in this same text she speaks about nihilism as the fragmentation of ourselves:

> 'We must wonder whether our culture remains in the service of

> humanity or instead contributes to its destruction through a fragmentation of us into parts which are still smaller, more partial, more dead. Such a culture, then, sometimes appeals to our eyes, sometimes to our ears, sometimes speaks through words and sometimes through images, but never gathers us with all our perceptions, and never allows us to really approach one another, notably with the whole of ourselves. Which ends in a sort of neutralization, a kind of nihilism, even if it results in beautiful forms, appearances and discourses' (IBSW, 20)

We can see then that in her latest work she has a clear understanding of nihilism at the root of the Western philosophical tradition, as a neutralisation of our "being", as the reduction of everything to the same (Mortensen, 1994, 10; Zakin, 2011), and as the fragmentation of ourselves which results in neutralisation (Whitford, 1991, 133).

Most recently, in her questions to Michael Marder, which occupy the prologue to her dialogue with him in *Through Vegetal Being (2016)*, we hear again this concern for the problem of nihilism:

> 'I am extremely vigilant on the passage from a culture that was nihilistic, through its subjection of our global being to supra-sensitive values, to an epoch presumed to be postmetaphysical. I am afraid that what can then happen might be still more perilous for humanity'

(TVB, 4)

Ten years earlier in *Sharing the world (2008),* she raises this same concern for the danger of critique and the overcoming of the tradition being a nihilistic tendency:

> 'discovering the limited and sometimes erroneous character of our cultural construction can lead us to a destructive nihilism with respect to all our values, including that partial individualization which man has, with difficulty, gained. No doubt, to pass from one epoch to another requires am interpretive and critical attitude towards the past, but not necessarily a total destruction of our tradition' (SW, 132)

But even before this, in her text *between east and west (2002)* where, as we have seen, there is the focus on her passage between traditions, nihilism was discussed as that threat of nothingness in her opening essay, where she states: 'Has he not dominated all, or almost all, by his cleverness, only to arrive at nothing? And, surveying from on high the world, his world, does he not find himself finally excluded from it?' (BEW, 2). Failing to begin from himself, 'the reality he himself is', she asks, 'has he not proceeded from illusion to illusion?' (BEW, 2). In short, he dominates the world from upon high (abstractions, consciousness, and the speculative) ignorant of his objective reality as a gendered masculine subject: in the end, he comes to nothing (BEW, 1). And we

should recall, that her own existential quest is one of the main reasons why Luce Irigaray embarks on her difficult passage between East and West, and we can add that this is clearly also as personal means to facilitate the overcoming of nihilism.

The overcoming of nihilism for her is through sexuate difference, and our relation to an "other" who is different to us. This "other" offers us a 'means of overcoming nihilism without forgetting its teaching' (SW, 132) and who we reach from a corporeal sensibility:

> 'Cultivating our sensibility, including our corporeal sensibility, in order to enter into relation with a different other is also a way to escape the nihilism threatening our tradition as well as its critique. To decide in favour of the human truth that we can and want to be in relation to and with the other amounts to being faithful to a different truth from the one, dependent on a supra-sensible absolute, that has both exiled us from ourselves and separated us from one another' (SW, 135)

And further to this, in *Through Vegetal Being (2016)*, and in relation to Nietzsche's teaching of nihilism, she states quite clearly, 'I, for one, think that the cultural elaboration and the ethical practice of the relations between differently sexuated subjects, beginning with two, can act as both a passage and a basic structure for overcoming nihilism' (TVB, 4)

Luce Irigaray's great concern over the nihilism of Western culture is not a recent development, and I suggest it originates in her middle period with the classic text *An Ethics of Sexual difference (1993)*. In fact, I consider nihilism to be the main problem that Luce Irigaray is dealing with, since her middle phase of work onwards, which as we have seen, she claims sexuate difference, cultivated as a corporeal sensibility, can overcome (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 14). In *An Ethics of Sexual difference (1993)* she famously states that sexuate difference is 'one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age … [It] is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through' (ED, 5). Her entire oeuvre is undeniably an attempt to philosophically critique from, and then later philosophically (and often poetically) positively elaborate a position which recognises sexuate difference as the primary and fundamental difference. But if we read on from this oft quoted statement to hear what we are trying to save ourselves from, we see that the fundamental problem is nihilism:

> 'Think of it as an approach that would allow us to check the many forms that destruction takes in our world, to counteract a nihilism that merely affirms the reversal or the repetitive proliferation of the status quo values – whether you call them the consumer society, the circularity of discourse, the more or less cancerous diseases of our age, the unreliability of words, the end of philosophy, religious despair or regression into religiosity, scientistic or technical imperialism that fails

to consider the living subject' (ED, 5)

For Luce Irigaray, nihilism rears its head in many forms, and through the universal difference of sexuate difference we are looking to 'check' or undercut these many forms. The lack of an acknowledgement of sexuate difference for her, results in a single world (his History) constituted by a masculine subject and his philosophical discourse. Without sexuate difference we are left with only the possibility of the affirmation of a reversal, or the proliferation of the status quo of (masculine) values, which results in nihilism. The masculine singular subject – along with the feminist discourses from within that same paradigm – simply perpetuates the same masculine values or an inversion of the same (masculine) values, and this results in nihilism. Moreover, critique alone is not enough. In short, a woman cannot assume that she is the same as man, this would result in a perpetuation of the same masculine values by leaving us within a discourse bounded by a single subject: the masculine neutral subject such as the unsexed "I" of self-consciousness.

3.5. Luce Irigaray and the fabrication of the world

'Everywhere journeying, inexperienced and without issue, he comes to nothingness' (Sophocles, Cited in TBT, 68). There is much that is strange in the world, but Man is the strangest of all. He is uncanny, he is terrible, so begins the the first line of the section of *Antigone* which Luce Irigaray analyses, and the

first line of her own analysis of it.[56] Man moves outside of himself in order to master the world. He fears the world around him beginning with the sea, and so he makes boats and sets sail on the seas. The sea is an abyss for him, she thinks, and instead of facing the abyss within, he faces the abyss without, later projecting it onto the world at the cosmic level. In a similar sense the earth too must be mastered; it is dug up, plowed, and constructed upon. He commits a violence to the sea and to the earth. For Luce Irigaray:

> 'Man upsets the rhythm of natural growth. He plows the earth and obliges it to produce by force what it does not yield on its own … Man imposes a yoke upon the life that unfolds itself but whose foundation he does not inhabit' (TBT, 69)

The world must be mastered but he can no longer live in it. She asks us:

> 'Is this not because he feels foreign to this life which lives without him, this life which reproduces itself, which orders itself without his governance? Is this not a possible reason for the beginning of History? Is History not simply the other name for man's intolerance towards nature? From then on, does History not move in an opposite

[56] All the following section is paraphrased from the essay *'Between us a fabricated world'* found in TBT if not otherwise stated. Luce Irigaray analyses Antigone's Sophocles lines 332-375

direction: towards the oblivion of man's to be' (TBT, 69)

In order to differentiate himself from the world around him Man fabricates a world. This fabrication is the historical world as opposed to nature. To overcome the world of nature he substitutes its power for his own, he tames nature, and he does so through his fabrications: tools, vehicles, language. In short, *logos* and *techne*. The world of nature (the sea, the earth, plants, animals, and ultimately woman too) is tamed and controlled by his constructed world of History. It is this initial domination of the world around him and not the world within him which leads man to be the most uncanny, the most strange and the most terrible of all. It is through myth, not archaeology or anthropology, that we can interpret this first gesture of domination:

> 'the beginning is revealed in the interpretation of a mythology in which man imposes himself as the master of nature, after having been its slave … His gesture of dominion and the instruments which serve this domination: tools, language, intellect, the passions themselves, create, little by little, another world which dominates him – in the form of History, for example – and which exiles him from himself, even if he may feel closer to it because it is made by him' (TBT, 70)

Man was the slave to nature but he overcomes "her" by reversing the domination. In fact, he was not dominated at all, it was a projection because of

his fear of the sea (or his mother?) From his self-imposed position of a slave, however, he becomes the exiled master. His fabrication of History inverts the domination without him knowing it, and the violence he did to his natural home is returned to him by his History. He does not escape the uncanny, he simply loses himself within his own uncanniness projected outwards as History because of its familiarity, as opposed to that (nature) which was (perhaps) other to him in the first place:

> 'Man thus appears surrounded by a double power: the power of the universe around him and that of the world created by him which he does not recognize as his work, in particular as the work of his violence which is concealed in the everyday … Man lives in the uncanny, believing that he has tamed it. For him, the familiar is his violence become History. But in such a place, generated by his dominion, he is an exile … Man has become estranged from his to be and thinks in an improper fashion. He considers himself to be the master of the very thing which dominates him' (TBT, 70)

As we saw above Nishitani Keiji makes a very similar move: through a mistake in man's consciousness, a false consciousness, albeit of a different kind; man mistakenly divides the world and then comes to dominate it, but it too dominates him as he becomes more and more mechanized. For Luce Irigaray, this domination leads to his own domination in turn by the constructed world around him. However, the key difference we see here from Luce Irigaray's

perspective, is that it is not merely a mistake in the neutral formation of consciousness that causes man to dominate the natural world around him; in fact, this domination of the natural world (and also his break with his mother, as we saw above in the Freudian analysis) is all in order to establish himself as "himself" and as separate to the natural and the reproductive which are out of his control. For Luce Irigaray, man or Man's prejudice of himself as the only subject, as a self-conscious self, outside of the natural world, is constituted by the domination of the external world – it is not a simple mistake. In short, the inner is constituted through the domination of the outer which establishes a self-consciousness as separate from one's mother and the natural world. It is not a simple mistake which leads to domination, rather, domination of the projected external world leads to self-conscious isolation. But, this domination has deeper roots in fear. In Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji we see two very different interpretations of a certain dynamic which they both agree is taking place.

To return to Luce Irigaray, it is not that man is inherently violent. It is simply that his original gesture was brought about by a fear of nature: the sea, the earth, the animals, woman (as his mother?). His original slavery to nature is illusory. There are things, beings or forces which are beyond his power and so he makes a world within his power which protects him from this natural world without. He convinces himself he is master of his world. His first gesture of domination is due to fear; but this original world which he is afraid of was his home, and so he becomes estranged from it and from himself throught his same domination. Moreover, in his newly and gradually constructed world of History

he comes to be dominated for a second time by his own constructions; both without realising it, and without recognising it as his own making. Man is doubly uncanny because of his fear and then because he projects slavery on to himself. In essence, he makes a world of a masculine history which enslaves him for a second time. What we must ask then is, are the projection of the abyss outside of himself, and this obliteration of being, the same as Nishitani Keiji's nihility?

Why does Man, or a man, go outside of himself? And why has his History, his science, and his technology been one concerned with seeing everything as outside of himself? Why does he only know, construct, dominate, and commit violence against that which is outside of him? Why does he never turn to himself, inward, to the abyss of himself? As we will see, for Nishitani Keiji this turning or inquiring inwards is the solution. Luce Irigaray asks, why does man oppose himself to all that is terrible in nature as opposed to its calm? Why does he remember it is frightening and not its sweet side? He yokes everything domesticating it for his own purposes. He makes it safe and then he goes on to name it. *Techne* as tools, science and knowledge make everything tame and familiar so that he can master the world around him. But it is always a world outside of himself. It is in the opposing of generation to fabrication that we see a clue to the answer to these questions from Luce Irigaray's perspective. His relationship to his mother and his birth is problematic for his subjective development. What Luce Irigaray wants to elaborate is that a man will never be able to generate like his mother, so 'he must fabricate things from outside of himself, in order to separate himself from the mother; he must manufacture

externally, while she generates internally' TBT, 76).

Here we have seen one of the classic insights of psychoanalysis being elaborated through the myth of Antigone. For Luce Irigaray, man, like all his interpretations of the world, has come to nothing. And 'death, of each and all, seems the only thing that resists man's destructive power' (BEW, 1-2). His failure to allow for a world based on two subjects (owing to his own need for overcoming the mother-son relation via objects and fabrications) means he is isolated and unable to relate to an other as an other. It is perhaps this inability or lack of desire to relate to an other, which is another possible cause of this domination of nature and woman (TBT, 69). He can only relate to an other as an object, and so he is all alone in his domination of the world around him from his position as the only subject over and against nature (which includes woman.) It is for this reason that Luce Irigaray attempts to establish a second subject who speaks differently from a different body and in a different relational position to the world and an other. We shall discuss this formation of the sexed subject in the following chapter.

3.6. Conclusion: Men and Women, united in nihility/nothingness

By examing the problem of nihilism in this chapter, I have shown several points of convergence between Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray. Fundamentally, Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji agree that an objectification

of the external world leads to an isolated ego and the domination of nature, as well as ultimately the objectification or mechanisation of ourselves. Luce Irigaray refers to this as nothingness, and Nishitani Keiji nihility. I consider nothingness to be one half of the dynamic of nihility as found in Nishitani Keiji.

Through this juxtaposition I have have shown that for both philosophers the role of domination in this dynamic is important, but clearly the cause of this domination differs for each. For Luce Irigaray, it is the misunderstanding of man's relationship to his mother by which he falls into fear of the external world, isolating himself and learning to dominate it. For Nishitani Keiji, it is a mistake inherent to the relational dynamic of self-consciousness which causes a self prejudice or ego-centred action, whereby he isolates himself and comes to dominate the world through mechanization. In Luce Irigaray the focus is on fear; in Nishitani Keiji, it is ignorance.

For Luce Irigaray this domination is found in man's privileging of his relation to objects, or his manipulation and fabrication of objects, in order to overcome the natural world through dominating it. Whereas for Nishitani Keiji, it is a self-misunderstanding owing to the dynamic of self-consciousness which causes the need to dominate the external world. On the most general level, I have shown that Nishitani Keiji begins from his relation to things. He does not define himself relationally with others, and especially not to his mother, or between human beings who are potentially different according to sex/gender; he is, as we might expect, blind to the dynamic of sexuate difference. He defines

himself in relation to the external world of trees and rivers etc.; but for Luce Irigaray, it is important for a man to think through his relation to his mother as the first other. For her, a man, without defining himself in relation to an other who is different to him such as a woman, a man will always fall into a nihilistic position by attempting to define himself, all by himself, in relation to the objects of the world. The maternal relationship is central to her thinking and for her it has not been thought at all within the history of Western philosophy. This is a major reason why man has come to nothing, as she states:

> 'it is the mother who first brings us into the world. The world she gives to us, and to which she gives us, is necessarily present in our way of experiencing the world and of living in the world. But the philosopher has not yet considered this' (SW, 123)

This blind spot in Western philosophy is therefore, carried over into a blind spot of Nishitani Keiji's global philosophy, if we do not think through this relation to our birth. Luce Irigaray's critique of Western culture and philosophy is levelled at this 'forgetting of her' (KW viii) and 'a subjectivity in the feminine' (KW vii). This forgetting has caused a huge imbalance in man's relation to woman and to nature, leading to the development of a phallocratic and patriarchal society (Grosz, 1984, 104-107), which has eradicated sexuate difference:

> ‘sexuate difference is precisely what Western culture has abolished. Western man has constructed his subjectivity against his natural origin. He did not work out his maternal beginning but put it into the unthought background of his story and history. To escape a return to such a substratum, he has elaborated a culture of the same as he is: father, brother, son, who share the same necessities, the same values, the same world’ (KW, ix)

Therefore, in defining his relationship to all things as a self-consciousness Nishitani Keiji falls into this category of man as understood by Luce Irigaray. On the other hand, Nishitani Keiji does not begin his philosophizing from his relation to manufactured objects, he starts from the natural world around him in order to elucidate the structure of the field of consciousness (recall it was trees and mountains which represented the external world. He too has serious issues with the mechanized and objectified world we live in.) Moreover, it is not a philosophizing based on domination of that natural world; rather, it is a simple mistake in how we see ourselves in relation to it. Therefore, his thought does not arise from a position of manipulating and constructing objects owing to his fear of the natural world or his inherent violence; rather, this domination arises from a misunderstanding of himself in the mode of self-consciousness. It is precisely this return to nature that Luce Irigaray suggests in the following chapter, as well as a pathway for men in her image of the Buddha looking at a flower, as we shall see in chapter five. Nishitani Keiji too, advocates a re-interpretation of our relationship to nature, to overcome the problem of nihilism, and this is the focus of the juxtaposition in

the following chapter. Although I can say here, that sexuate difference is still absent from this understanding.

Follwing on from this critique is that, self-consciousness, like most of Nishitani Keiji's language, is sex/gender neutral, and in light of Luce Irigaray's thought we have to say that this is unacceptable. For her we can recall, 'that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine"' (SP, 133). Any neutral or abstract subject is always a (masculine) subject because it comes from within a masculine horizon, or a male subject's constructed world, a male History. According to the philosophy of sexuate difference there is no possibility of an abstract "I" or a transcendent subject such as a subject defined as "consciousness" or a "thinking thing". Neither is it possible to have neutral and disembodied speech devoid of its gendered objectivity. There is no subject, even if he or she is constituted on a self-consciousness and a nihility which is gender neutral. Our self as relational, for Luce Irigaray, is an (inter)subjectivity, always grounded in the objectivity of our birth, our necessary primary relationship to our mother, our body, our breath and our speech (language). These factors make up our gender or genre, as she states: 'I am not the whole: I am man or woman. And I am not simply a subject, I belong to a gender' (ILTY, 106). We are never neutral, we are always bound in a relational matrix of sexuate difference, so to speak of self-consciousness in the neutral erases this fact.

For Luce Irigaray then, Nishitani Keiji's language and conceptual

framing of the problem of nihilism is gender neutral, and it does not incorporate what for her is the fact of sexuate difference. Erin McCarthy's (2010) use of *ningen*, and her attempt to include the dynamic of sexuate difference within it, would be an attempt to address this lack in the Japanese concept for human being; which is, in essence a (masculine) neutrality, if we take seriously Luce Irigaray's claim that all theories of the subject irrespective of cultural difference have been appropriated by the masculine. Nishitani Keiji's elaboration of the problem of Western philosophy and culture as driven by a nihilistic motor, is therefore, another attempt to eradicate sexuate difference, this time, from another perspective outside of the Western philosophical tradition, but nevertheless, one which maintains the same patriarchal masculine bias of a false neutrality; even if, this dynamic is one which is unconscious or which he is ignorant of.

The critique of Nishitani Keiji's sex/gender neutral language is an obvious one, but at the same time we can perhaps read more deeply into his thought in his defence. For Luce Irigaray, nothingness is what Nishitani Keiji would call nihility. I think it is very difficult to ignore the profound analysis of nihility and the human condition which Nishitani Keiji makes, irrespective of whether we are men or women (or anyone with sex/gender ambiguity for that matter). We exist together on a profound level on a field of consciousness which is fundamentally a field of internal/external mediation. How we might be sexuately formed and how we might mediate this difference is to be taken into consideration (which we shall discuss in the following chapters.) However, even if this inner and outer manifests differently according to sexuate difference,

there would still be a fundamental similarity for all human beings, and perhaps even for many other sentient beings, at the most subtle level on the field of consciousness. It is a similarity then which would underlie the possibility of any difference (sexuate or otherwise) in our self-consciousness, with which we each find ourselves on that field of consciousness as a man or a woman. In many ways, this does return us to the concept of human being as *ningen*.

Erin McCarthy (2010) has rightly pointed out, that what is required is an understanding of the dynamic of sexuate difference which takes place within this concept of the human being as *ningen*. Therefore, an increase in awareness of the differences in self-understanding, and how the subject is constituted in the relationship to the world outside of us, is what is required for such a modification in self-understanding between men and women to take place on the field of consciousness.

We are all as subjects constituted on the field of self-consciousness, but that self-consciousness manifests in different ways, which may in fact differ most fundamentally according to sexuate difference. But we must remember that this elucidation of self-consciousness by Nishitani Keiji is in fact a critique by him. The field of self-consciousness is not the answer, it is part of the necessary make up of the self (as is nihility), but it is not where we shall see or overcome our domination and violence of the world around us. For Nishitani Keiji, domination and violence are inevitable on the field of consciousness which inherently differentiates external and internal with the resulting self-

prejudice and ego-centred perspective that arises on it. For him, we must pass through nihility to overcome this. I would say then that this is still a problem for Luce Irigaray and her thought of sexuate difference, because she does not go deeply enough into what she calls nothingness.

To summarise, a strong differentiation between men and women on the field of consciousness – as two different self-consciousnesses – in fact maintains and increases conflict and violence, while at the same time it will inevitably fall into a nihilistic position due to the reification of two different self-consciousnesses, which are not fully aware of their underlying nihility, and therefore, either exist in a superficial way or run the risk becoming a sort of essential self – a self-understanding with some illusory sense of permanency or transcendence, such as the soul for example.

It is nihility which safeguards against such a mis-understanding of the self, and I think I can safely claim that nihility is something that all people (men, women and all possible sexual ambiguities) must share as a perennial problem. Nihilism is a problem for men and women alike. The fact that our existence is finite and that existence in general is transient is unescapable. Nihility is "always underfoot" no matter whether we are men or women. That a man has come to nothing, and that a woman has been subordinated to a nothingness or an absence, shows the two sides of self-consciousness and nihility. The one which dominates comes to nothing, the one who is dominated also comes to nothing. An excessive self-enclosed ego comes to nothingness, an oppressed ego

is not allowed to come from nothingness in the first place. A subjectivity which ends in nothingness and a subjectivity which never had a chance to be anything else but nothingness, are fundamentally united in their alienation on the field of nihility, albeit for very different reasons.

By bringing together Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji, I have shown that nihility is a problem which is also effected by our understanding or position on the field of sexuate difference. Men and women will experience nihility in fundamentally different and sexuate specific ways, but we are all, each one of us, still cast over a nihility, and there may be collective or cultural trends which bring about a culture of nihilism with an accompanying dynamic of sexuate difference at its root. The danger is, that this is becoming a singular global dynamic which does not recognise sexuate difference, and which perpetuates the same dynamic of domination which has prevailed up until now.

Ultimately then, both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray use concepts such as nothingness and nihility to explain the basic problem and the cause of the nihilistic Western cultural tradition, but in how it is caused and how we overcome it they have different standpoints. For now, it is enough to note the absence of any sex/gender sensitivity in Nishitani Keiji's thought as he articulates the problem of nihilism, making it apparent that his thought is not sensitive to the ethical issues of sex/gender. From Luce Irigaray's perspective, it could be claimed that he works towards the further eradication of sexuate difference, and that this means he has doomed himself to fall further into

nihilism, even if this is because he simply gets the diagnosis wrong. However, I have claimed that Luce Irigaray too has a limited view of nothingness/nihility, and that nihility itself can be taken into consideration along with sexuate difference as a fundamental problem of human beings (*ningen*), both I-he and I-she. In the following chapters, we shall look at how Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji both seek to overcome nihilism as we have seen here. We shall look more closely at the role the sexuate body plays in the establishment of the positions of I-he and I-she, and I will now begin to include Nishitani Keiji's own positive and creative use of *śūnyatā* and the non-self, to create two positions of non-he and non-she.

4

Overcoming nihilism: nature, body and breath

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I want to juxtapose Nishitani Keiji's thinking on nature, body and cultivating ourselves through the breath with Luce Irigaray's thought on the vegetal, the body and self-cultivation through the breath. The aim is to begin to show how these can come together to overcome the problem of nihilism, which I have established as something they both share.

The main point I want to make here is the need for a sexuate understanding of the body for sexuate difference to be possible, while at the same time, this bodily difference must be re-integrated with nature in a non-essential way. This re-integration with, and re-interpretation of, nature for both Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji, is discovered through Eastern practices of bodily realisation. On the one hand, Nishitani Keiji's blind spot of sexuate difference becomes increasingly apparent here, while on the other hand, Luce Irigaray's need for a non-dual understanding of reality becomes more apparent,

if we are to maintain sexuate difference non-essentially. My aim, therefore, is to hold both sexuate difference of the body and the no-self simultaneously on the field of *śūnyatā*. To understand this, we need to examine the re-interpretation of nature and its relation to culture, before we return to the question of the self, the body and self-cultivation through Eastern practices.

4.2. Nature, body and culture in Luce Irigaray

Much has been written on the sexed duality of nature which Luce Irigaray attempts to elaborate (Stone 2003, 2006).[57] In her work *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual difference (2006)* Alison Stone offers a clear overview of Luce Irigaray's philosophy of nature in her middle to later phases. Much of what I write here is reliant on this work.

The focus of Alison Stone's analysis is that the duality of sexuate difference is grounded in a nature which is rhythmical and fluid, and how this relates to a realist essentialist interpretation of her thought. As she rightly points out, nowhere does Luce Irigaray systematically set out her thoughts on nature (Stone 2006, 89). However, her thought is often implicitly engaging with the history of philosophy, especially, as we have seen earlier, philosophers such

[57] For a full overview of this debate see Stone (2006, 88-93).

as Hegel (Stone, 2006, 10-11). How we handle sexuate difference in relation to nature and culture is paramount for Luce Irigaray's project. This is because, as we have seen, the history of philosophy, deeply reinforces the split between nature and consciousness, with woman being associated with nature, while man is associated with consciousness (See Genevieve Lloyd's classic study *The man of Reason, 1993*). We see this, in relation to Hegel, in her *Democracy Begins Between Two (2000)* Luce Irigaray clearly states her aim is, 'To pass from the state of nature to civil life without abandoning the relationship with nature – that nature which surrounds us as bodies, sexed bodies, as woman and man' (DBT, 47). The main point is that she is speaking of human beings as being constituted as sexed, through our bodies, and as part of nature, and that this is not to be overcome by consciousness (associated with man) in the realm of history, by cutting ourselves off from, or transcending nature (associated with woman).[58]

My focus here, is on the Eastern influences of her re-interpretation of nature as a sexed interpretation based on masculine and feminine cultures and two different subjects with two different relational differences, so that I might juxtapose these to Nishitani Keiji's own thought. Sokhtan Yeng (2014, 66) points out the importance of Luce Irigaray's Eastern ideas in relation to Hegel's thought, 'Irigaray shows herself to be an astute reader of Hegel by integrating an interpretation of Buddhism into her challenge to Hegelian philosophy'. In many ways I follow this, albeit with an understanding that Tantra and Yoga are

[58] See Cheah and Grosz (1998, 8-9)

her main supports, not Buddhism. The attempt to tie human beings to nature, through the body and breath, and the relationship between nature and culture that emerges from this reworked relationship, is very interesting for my juxtaposition with Nishitani Keiji. What we need to be aware of, is that traditionally it has been a masculine culture's perspective which reduced woman to nature, and which has been the prevailing interpretation (Jones, 2011, 200-210). Man is a subject; woman is an object bound up with nature. We might be cautious then when approaching the Japanese concepts of self-understanding as *ningen* and no-self therefore if we cannot reconcile them with sexuate difference.

In the essay *'Human nature is two'* Luce Irigaray, states, 'the natural is at least two: male and female' (ILTY, 34). Likewise, in *Sexes and Genealogies* she clearly states, 'Nature has a sex, always and everywhere' (108). At first glance, and taken out of context, it sounds as though she has a *naïve* perspective on nature as sexed; she appears to claim that all nature is two, male and female.[59] A brief examination of this as a hermeneutical claim leads us to a view that nature is somehow sexed all the way down. It is sexuate from the human perspective, which is for her always two male and female, and where men and women each have a clear rhythmical difference and culture from where they will interpret nature. It is her East-West encounter which in fact taught her this:

[59] According to Gail Schwab, Luce Irigaray's claim that nature is sexed is based on the loose approximations of the terms male and female to other forces in nature which are not necessarily sexed (Schwab; cited in Stone 2006, 89).

> ‘[I] learnt another way from my own experience and from the traditions of the Far East, in particular from the most primitive Indian cultures … These primitive cultures practise the differences in the relationship between man and woman, including in physical love. But, for them, it is not a question of a dual polarity within one, as things still are in the West where, from Aristotle onwards, it is said that man is hot, dry, active and woman, in contrast damp, cold and passive. They talk instead of drawing out the qualities of the one (female) and the other (male) (DBT, 113)

Here she is speaking of the intertwined polarities in nature and in men and women. How each has different qualities and arrangements of these qualities and how they complement, draw out, return to and create desire between two who are different. This way of understanding the manifest world (usually understood as nature) as sexuately differentiated poles with mixtures of different qualities pervades many of the Asian traditions from South Asia to the Far East. The understanding of the manifest world as essentially two forces which are masculine and feminine in nature can be found in classical Chinese thought (Yin-Yang) and in Indian thought as well as many of the Tantric traditions (Loma-Viloma) including Esoteric Buddhism from Tibet to Japan. While it may be considered a primitive way of understanding the world, these “ways of understanding” are somehow more relatable and tied to the idea of

human cultivation, especially of the psyche. This re-integration of men and women as a part of nature, therefore, requires sexuate difference.

Yin and Yang or Loma-Viloma meet and merge, they interchange, they are both always present between an appearing and withdrawing. It is not a dialectic between two points which never meet. It is rather, a dialectic between two forces which actually flow into or back upon each other. These 'sexual' terms are always in alternation and not contradiction. They are not logical, but rather based on interchange and fluidity:

> 'this is not the opposition that we know from logic in which the one is opposed to or contradicts the other, where the one is superior to the other and must put the inferior down. There is a rhythm and growth in which both poles are necessary, or so it seems' (SG, 108)

It is this dynamic interchange and constant balancing of forces which gives rise to all manifestation. Often, as Luce Irigaray comments, the sexual interaction of male and female human beings is symbolic of this interchange. Sometimes, it is even considered to be a sacred act of enacting this very flow of forces as a means of uniting between two and with the whole. But we should remember that sexuate identity is not the same as sexuality. A more common approach than sexual congress in order to develop and play with these two forces, uses practices that focus on the breath and the cultivation of the body.

Such a practice is in fact Hatha Yoga – Hatha being the joining of solar and lunar energies, another way of understanding the two forces at play in manifestation (Feuerstein, 2008, 352).

These worldviews include the awareness of life or vitality as a specific kind of energy (Chi, Ki or Prana) which we are somehow cultivating, to create balance, harmony or union with ourselves, each other and the cosmos. The two forces then are a useful way to understand nature and our place in the world, because they include the cultivation of the human psyche. Traditionally, it is understood that a human being can become aware of these two forces and engage in physical practices to balance and enhance them within themselves, with others and with the natural world – practices such as Yoga, Tai chi, Zen meditation, walking in nature, to name just a few. For Luce Irigaray, such practices would have to be engaged in, with sexuate difference in mind.

Luce Irigaray follows Hegel in many respects concerning the relation between nature and culture. She goes her own way however, when it comes to culture as self-cultivation, where the Eastern influences are more apparent. In my reading of Luce Irigaray, I understand her to mean that nature is a play of forces which function between two poles approximating to, or often interpreted as, the masculine and the feminine. Nature's forces are interpreted in sexuate terms by a tradition which is itself also always sexuate. These forces therefore, are not necessarily sexed but can be read as so, and this is common across traditions, especially so called primitive traditions: 'all traditions that remain

faithful to the cosmic have a sex and take account of natural powers (*puissances*) in sexual terms' (SG, 108). For Luce Irigaray, human beings are intimately bound up with nature, and are seen as one part of its many rhythms:

> 'There is a rhythmic pulse which beats between going out towards the other and returning to the self, between extending oneself as far as the other and returning to dwell within the self, between coming out into the light and going back into the darkness, into the invisibility of interiority, into the mystery of alterity … This movement resembles that of the heart, of the circulation of blood, but also that of the cosmos itself which exists between expansion and contraction. It is true of the entire universe, but can already be seen in the sap of the plant world, in the behaviour of animals, just as in the movement of the sea, in the alternating of the seasons, in the repetitive intensities of the light and of the heat of the sun, in the cycles of humidity and dryness, of the winds and the cyclones' (DBT, 111-112)

Here we find again the microcosm-macrocosm understanding of our relationship to nature. Human beings are unique within the flux and flow of nature because they can cultivate themselves in multiple senses. In fact, culture is the unique activity of human beings as they cultivate their natural rhythms in relation to the flux and flow of nature (Stone, 2006, 91). Usually, culture is understood as a collective enterprise, wherever human beings live together. We can understand culture for Luce Irigaray, as the cultivation of our natural

rhythms as a part of nature. Culture and nature are therefore, always entwined in Luce Irigaray's thought. However, the creation of shared cultural forms, come out of natural rhythms, which differ according to our sexuate bodily relational existence as male or female. As she said, she wants civil life without abandoning or transcending nature.

For Luce Irigaray, masculine culture has attuned to a male rhythm which is more linear and based on a tension-release model (Stone, 2006, 102). Feminine culture, on the other hand, is based on a female cyclical rhythm which has the quality of irreversibility (Stone, 2006, 102).[60] This leads to the development of masculine and feminine specific cultures, and feminine culture, for her, has been supressed within this masculine culture. This is one of the reasons why she has engaged with Eastern culture: to re-invigorate feminine culture (Joy, 2006; Deutscher, 2002). Furthermore, for Luce Irigaray, masculine and feminine cultures are also bound up with concepts of the divine, such as the divine couple as found in South India and especially Tantra yoga. Since *between east and west (2002)* the divine couple has played an important role for her in redefining ourselves and our relation to nature, i.e., the micro-macro relationship:

> 'In India men and women are gods together, and together they create the world, including its cosmic dimension. The divine couples,

[60] It should be noted that Alison Stone considers this rhythmical understanding to still be essentialist (2006, 104-107)

whether it is Vishnu or Śiva, along with their lovers, are microcosms in constant economic relations with the macrocosm; the same goes for Tantrism' (BEW, 29)

What is important for us to focus on here is the understanding of natural and cultural rhythms. We can imagine that cultural forms may or may not actually be in-tune with the rhythms of our nature. Sexuate difference is clearly linked to the cultivation of our selves in-tune with nature, and therefore, any interpretation of nature must include the primordial difference of sexuation, if it is to preserve and promote the establishment of two sexuately different subjects. This cultivation of nature to culture to the divine is sexuate through and through, and any practices to cultivate ourselves must adhere to this sexuate nature, or there is the danger of once again falling into a nihilism of abandonment or transcendence.

4.3. Nature, body and culture in Nishitani Keiji

For Nishitani Keiji, on the first level, nature is the wholistic origin of life and being. It is the living-whole from which we emerge and return, along with all other living things: being emerges from becoming and is sustained on a self-understanding of *śūnyatā*. It is an ever-ongoing process best captured by the Buddhist teaching of interdependent origination, re-interpreted in light of philosophy in the Twentieth Century:

> ‘all things come to be, and perish, and thus are set in a “becoming and flow.” It is not that all things merely “are,” but that they become; they undergo transformation and thus are set in “motion and flow.” Judging from this, we can say that for a thing to “be” means that it nevertheless springs out of the world of nature, undergoes transformations, and finally returns to it again. In this case, nature is regarded as a living whole’ (OB, 101)

At the first level then, nature is a flux and a flow, an interdependent net of becoming and being. This is reminiscent of the Buddhist doctrine of *Pratītyasamutpāda* as discussed earlier, and we must always bear this in mind when approaching Nishitani Keiji’s thought (Van Bragt, 1982, xxv; See also Davis, 2013). Nature includes the plant and animal worlds as living-things. We breathe, and in many respects, share the elements essential to living, especially water, and this is fundamental to realising the interconnectedness of our self-nature or *jisei*:

> ‘we are connected to the environment through our bodies. And it goes without saying that we cannot maintain our lives without air, water, and so forth. This can be said not only of human beings but of animals and plants as well. Air circulates in such a way that the air I breathe is in turn breathed by someone else, and the air a plant breathes

> is in turn breathed by me. And water also goes around the sky, falls to the earth, and then is available to animals and plants living on the earth. We can say that water and air are essential means of our life' (OB, 98)

Here we see the focus on the interchange of the simple elements such as water and air, and the focus on the process and relationship of ourselves and plant life, especially in our breathing. This description by Nishitani Keiji is a living interchange reminiscent of Luce Irigaray's own poetic evocations of the vegetal. Her Eastern influenced interpretation of nature juxtaposed to Nishitani Keiji's interpretation of nature shows the fruitful possibilities of dialogue between East and West.

In his article 'On Nature' (1979),[61] Nishitani Keiji goes on to juxtapose several interpretations of nature from various Western and Eastern philosophical perspectives. Much of the article 'On Nature' (1979) is concerned with the English, German, Greek and Latin etymology of terms used to define nature in the history of Western philosophy. Through his comparative etymological inquiry of these Western languages Nishitani Keiji arrives at the Latin term "*Nasco*" as closest to his own understanding of nature.[62] This is a Japanese understanding, which is clearly influenced by his own cultural prejudice. However, this understanding is more nuanced than simply claiming

[61] This lecture was given in 1979, published in *Confluences (2005)*
[62] Here I think he (or the translator) means the term "*Nasci*" which is literally the Latin for "to be born"

nature is a flux and a flow. It includes a subtler analysis of the interplay of being and becoming as understood in the Japanese language.

Nature, according to Nishitani Keiji, is best captured in the Japanese language by terms such as *shizen* or *jinen*. *Shizen* is a common term for nature, natural and spontaneous, while *Jinen* is an older word which includes 'changing and not-changing in one' (ON, 67) meaning 'on the one hand the principle of change or continuous movement … [becoming] and at the same time there is the principle of *Sein* [being]' (ON, 67). I want to emphasise here that the meaning of *shizen* or *jinen* should not be confused by our own prejudice of seeing essence or innate quality in a definition. They are not fixed definitions of separate unchanging entities which he is attempting to express in words; rather, they are terms which for him encapsulate both the sense of becoming and being in one, which is more familiar in the Japanese language. It includes the "becoming and flow" which was spoken of above, but more than this, it is a term used in Japanese which contains two meanings, one such as nature, and another such as natural or spontaneous. For him the term "*ji*" best captures the nature of a thing and the self:

> '*Jinen* includes the idea that a thing naturally becomes this way; in other words it includes the "self" [E] when we talk of the thing "itself" [E]. It is thought that all things are in each case themselves, and *jinen* is thought from the relations among those things, the relation between such a "self" and "self" [E]. I think that the way the relation between *ji*

and *ji* works is quite different from the way the world is structured in western thought. It is not clear where something like *jinen* becomes a problem in the West. In the case of the natural sciences such an issue is entirely absent' (ON, 70-71)

For him, living-things are *shizen* or *jinen,* translated as nature, natural or spontaneous, as Graham Parkes (1990, xxvii) notes, 'things in nature are what they are, and do what they do "without why."' This includes rocks and trees, birds and animals, and the self-nature (*jisei*) of each individual human being. From this perspective all things are entwined and hence, there is no single cause or quality to any of them – each thing mutually constitutes all other things. It is a broad perspective from where we can perceive the deep interconnection of all things. It is from this perspective which Nishitani Keiji re-envisions nature, as a co-constitutive becoming and flow from which human beings emerge, but which we also always remain a part of, even if as a self-consciousness we think we are somehow separate. This is the cause of alienation and nihilism. It is our cultivation in-tune with nature that Nishitani Keiji, like Luce Irigaray, is also pointing to. For Nishitani Keiji, the human body is co-constitutive of nature as a becoming and flow, it is the place where individual self-consciousness arises, and it is the place where human relationship occurs. For him the human body emerges from the web of nature:

'the human body is, from the outset, unified with the world of nature in such a way that it is impossible to separate the two. It is a part

of what comprises the natural world' (OB, 98)

At the same time, as self-conscious human beings we feel ourselves to be individual:

> 'Human existence can be characterised as being absolutely alone – that is to say, as not being substitutable by any another. This is precisely what is meant by an individual, in the genuine sense of the word' (OB, 89)

For Nishitani Keiji then, there are two poles entangled in the human body:

> 'one of them is that the human body is an element constituting the world of nature; the other, is that it is the "I" that sets in motion the world of nature by standing aloof from it, and by manipulating knowledge and techniques' (OB, 103)

Here we can understand the "I" as self-consciousness and note that it is sex neutral. For him, the human body lives between two poles, or, as he says, it has a double characteristic. It is paradoxically, an indispensable part co-

constituting nature as a living whole, while at the same time being aloof from this wholistic nature.

Our shared sense of existence in the world, also manifests through the human body, 'human beings appear to each other in the form of a human body' (OB, 81) and 'because of this, the character of "I" and "thou" is revealed in the way of being as a body' (OB, 81). Our own existence, and the existence of another, includes both the body and the sense of self as an individual "I" and is revealed to us in this betweenness of our shared existence: 'the issue of being concerning an individual human being cannot be accounted for apart from the betweenness, or the relation, that he or she bears to other human beings' (OB, 83). For Nishitani Keiji, there is a "togetherness" which fundamentally structures our existence as human beings, and the body is fundamental to this structure of human existence (OB, 83).

Furthermore, much like we saw in Luce Irigaray's thought in the previous chapter, for Nishitani Keiji our shared social being takes place within a constructed world:

> 'This "I" is an acting agent with self-conscious knowledge in view. Here is a full-fledged practical standpoint in contradistinction to "becoming and flow." By taking advantage of the knowledge that includes within itself even knowledge about nature (that is, knowledge of the laws

> of nature), subjectivity tries to establish its own world (that is, the sociohistorical world). This world is no longer the world of nature, but the world that human beings have constructed with clear-cut consciousness out of the world of nature. Therefore, it is called history, culture or human society' (OB, 102-103)

As human beings with a body, we are inescapably rooted in nature. At the same time, as individuals with self-consciousness who are bound up with the collective world of human beings, we cut ourselves off from nature (and presumably our bodies) in a shared and constructed world on the field of consciousness. From this perspective, the body is left behind in nature, and our relational existence between self and other, between nature and culture, is lost. Each unique human individual has this paradoxical existence between or in relation to their body, self-consciousness, nature, and the socio-cultural constructed world, if we cut ourselves away from a part of it, we fall into nihilism. We can see then a clear similarity in the thought of Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji when it comes to understanding ourselves as a part of nature and a misunderstanding which leads us to a nihilistic position.

One way to make sure this doesn't happen, is by cultivating our relationship to the body. The sense of self-existence emerges out of the body and is always tied to the body (OB, 81) even if the 'I' thinks itself separate, body and self-consciousness are bound together (OB, 81). At one level, as we saw, this body emerges from nature understood as a becoming and flow; and once again,

even though we feel ourselves to stand outside of nature, and reflect on it as separate to ourselves, this is in fact owing to the field of consciousness. Finally, it is through bodily knowing that we return to nature. As McCarthy points out in, 'the Japanese philosophical tradition, the body is not considered inimical to knowledge but, rather, necessary for its attainment' (2014, 206). We go down through the body as we re-integrate ourselves with nature:

> 'the human body develops a variety of characteristics that can be described through such phrases as "to acquire knowledge in such a way that it becomes a real bodily appropriation," "to come home to one's body," or "to take a bodily interest in something." The phrase "to take a bodily interest in something" means to absorb oneself wholeheartedly in it. I think that taking a bodily interest in things provides us with a clue as to how to think about the world of religion … Above I referred to the distinction between the world of nature and that of history. My point was to render it possible for human beings to come back to nature once again through their various activities. Human activity arises out of nature understood in the broadest sense, and even though human beings have produced the various sciences and technology as a means of struggling against nature, their ability to do these things was granted by nature, rather than arising from their own abilities alone. Human beings are born with a human body, and they are also gifted with this ability. And

this ability is given a further impetus to produce culture' (OB, 105)[63]

To summarise, the main point I wish to make here concerns the relation of the body to nature, to self-consciousness, and to culture. I think that this is where we begin to see the innovativeness of Nishitani Keiji's philosophy in one of its most concrete senses. The human body is really a place between living-nature as the Buddhist interpretation of becoming and flow, and the individual ego as "I", and the shared world of human beings or culture. For the former pole it is constitutive, and for the latter two, it is often negated, or objectified; to constitute the separate sense of self as self-consciousness, and the collective ordering of that self-consciousness in society. What is required is a return to nature through the body, and a bodily knowledge of one's self and one's relationships (OB, 136-137). The body, for Nishitani Keiji, is a place which bridges our understanding of nature and culture.

4.4. A body between nature and culture

In the first place, Nishitani Keiji's interpretation is, like Luce Irigaray's, opposed to the reduction of nature to an objective scientific view. Human beings, in modern culture, stand out from nature, by setting themselves against

[63] Nishitani Keiji's analysis here includes an understanding of the country or the land which a human being inhabits. I have not gone into this here because although important it is an aside for our discussion.

it, or as Nishitani Keiji will say, by understanding themselves as aloof from it. Nishitani Keiji, like Luce Irigaray, considers human beings to be a part of nature, and culture emerges out of its flux and flow through this standing aloof. In the most general sense I firmly agree with them both, that we need to re-interpret ourselves as a part of nature, and that culture, is the cultivation of our natural spontaneous tendency (*jinen*), which is best cultivated, as we shall see below, through practices of breathing.

However, according to Luce Irigaray, a tradition has a sex or includes sexuate differentiation within it, and its interpretation of the world is therefore sexuate. This interpretation by primitive traditions may have in fact have been prejudiced towards the dominant masculine culture, so a return to such understandings is not ideal (Joy, 2006, 130-131). The important point is, that these prejudices exist in the Western tradition, which masquerades as neutral. This apparently neutral tradition interprets nature, and it does so in a way that denies sexuate difference, and therefore, represses it. Nishitani Keiji's lack of reference to the sexuate quality of nature, culture and the body which bridges them is clearly a problem because it might mask sexuate difference.

For Nishitani Keiji, it is not sexuate difference that provides an alternative interpretive lens to see nature through, it is his formulation of the Buddhist understanding of interdependent origination and the idea of *jisei* or self-nature. This is a formulation we can best describe as asexual, because it does not include any awareness of sex/gender, not to mention take into

consideration sexuate difference as Luce Irigaray understands it. The Japanese philosophical tradition as exemplified by Nishitani Keiji here relates human existence to nature, it also does so from a neutrality which covers over or does not acknowledge the sexuate quality of our body, our culture and our interpretation, and therefore, our re-integration with nature. If we are to include a sexuate understanding of nature and culture, then Luce Irigaray's thought of sexuate difference must be reconciled with Nishitani Keiji's.

Human beings as men and women interpret the world from two different perspectives, as a part of nature, but also through the lens of sexuate difference. For Luce Irigaray, nature is two, because there are at least two possible interpretations of it, from two different sexuate bodies, with their own rhythms, and cultural modes of interpretation. To use Nishitani Keiji's terms, we can say that men and women have two different standpoints on the field of nature, an interdependent flux and flow of which they are an integral part. A culture of sexuate difference, which is in-tune with nature, is one which includes the specific rhythms of each part of nature, while seeing them as a part of a greater whole. I want to suggest that in human beings sexuate difference is the most fundamental relational quality which emerges from our natural way of being (*jinen*). Sexuate difference, therefore, is a human specific rhythm which underlies our togetherness as sexuate bodily beings, who are between the two poles of nature and culture. At the same time, these sexuate human specific rhythms are held on a greater field *śūnyatā,* which when combined safeguard our relational existence from falling into alienation and nihilism. However, we

need to look more closely at Luce Irigaray's understanding of birth and the body, in order to think this through more comprehensively.

4.5. Thinking through birth with Luce Irigaray

In her early work, Luce Irigaray followed a more or less Freudian approach to the body, seeing the ego as a bodily ego (Whitford, 1991, 63). Making explicit the difference between male and female bodies, tied to the masculine and feminine perspectives, gave her a tangible point from which to critique the tradition of psychoanalysis and the tradition of philosophy in her early works (Zakin, 2011). For example, the analysis of little Ernst, Freud's grandson, playing with a thimble, which is utilized by Freud to develop his thought on mother-son relations.[64] It is the juxtaposition of two sounds (Fort/Da) along with a gesture of throwing away and retrieving a thimble on a thread. In German *Fort* means "gone" and *Da* means "there". Freud is reluctant to interpret a theory as such from these observations, however, he does see these two sounds of an eighteen-month-old boy as his effort to manipulate the world (through the combination of a hand gesture, a sound and an object) as a repetitive act of play to compensate for his painful feelings, due to the absence of his mother. His little grandson, according to Freud, is therefore, not simply playing with an object but is in fact substituting this gesture and sound for the absence/presence of his mother and the pain and pleasure this reproduces.

[64] Freud, (1991, 283-287)

Fort, the thimble as his mother, is gone; *Da*, the thimble as his mother, is here. The boy has now established a symbolic means to deal with the of his mother and the pain it causes, through the manipulation of an object. And, for Freud, this is an achievement of culture, in other words, the overcoming of nature.

Luce Irigaray takes up Freud's analysis and problematizes it in a number of ways. Freud placed more emphasis on the act of repetition and mastery which gives Ernst pleasure and offsets the pain he feels at the loss of his mother. While Luce Irigaray here draws out the analysis from a perspective of sexuate difference. In short, a perspective from two different positions and not from only the masculine subject's interpretation. In her interrogation of Freud's interpretation, she wants to take further her analyses of the boy's relationship to (and privileging of) objects by looking at early child development from a psychoanalytic perspective.[65] In order to highlight this privileging of subject-object relations in boys she asks, what if the the little boy (Ernst) was a little girl?

> 'In Freud's text, then, the child is a boy. And Freud never wrote that it might have been a girl. Why? A girl does not do the same things when her mother goes away. She does not play with a string and a reel that symbolize her mother, because her mother is of the same sex as she is and cannot have the object status of a reel. The mother is of the same

[65] Mary Beth Mader (2003) has questioned Luce Irigaray's theory of childhood development.

subjective identity as she is' (SG, 97)

It is important to remember that for Luce Irigaray a subject's primary relationship is to one's mother. It is this relational difference which initiates sexuate difference: a difference which begins before we are born, in a (pre)subjective space within our mother. This continues to develop as we develop as children, in relation to the world around us, both subjects and objects. However, the little boy will privilege the subject-object relation; while the little girl the subject-subject relation, owing to this primary subject-subject relation with one's mother before we are even born. As she states:

> 'The relation of the little boy to his mother is different from the little girl's relation. The little boy, in order to situate himself vis-a-vis the mother, must have a strategy, perhaps a strategy of mastery, because he finds himself in an extremely difficult situation. He's a little boy. He has come out of a woman who's different from him. He himself will never be able to engender, to give birth. He is therefore in a space of unfathomable mystery. He must invent a strategy to keep himself from being submerged, engulfed … For the little boy, it's necessary to construct a world in order to construct himself' (JLI, 108)

Returning to Luce Irigaray's analysis of the Freud case study, she claims that a girl's reactions are quite different to a boy's:

1) When she misses her mother, she throws herself down on the ground in distress, she is lost, she loses the power and the will to live, she neither speaks nor eats, totally anorexic.
2) She plays with a doll, lavishing maternal affection on a quasi subject, and thus manages to organize a kind of symobolic space; playing with dolls is not simply a game girls are forced to play, it also signifies a difference in subjective status in the separation from the mother. For mother and daughter, the mother is a subject that cannot easily be reduced to an object, and a doll is not an object the way that a reel, a toy car, a gun, etc., are objects and tools used for symbolization.
3) She dances and this forms a vital subjective space open to the cosmic maternal world, to the gods, to the present other. This dance is also a way for the girl to create a territory of her own in relation to the mother (SG 97-98)[66]

It is the second of these three which is most revealing for our purposes here. While a little boy will play with an object (a toy car for example) the little girl will play with a doll; a quasi-subject, which signifies a different way of relating to the world around her in her mother's absence. Because her mother is a subject like she is (remembering the importance of their sameness in engendering, body, and speech) the little girl likes to play with a toy which

[66] For an excellent further analysis of this dynamic see Tamsin Lorraine (1999, 29-32)

resembles this subject to subject relationship. It is this factor of engendering which is so important for Luce Irigaray:

> 'Among women, the relationship to sameness and to the mother is not mastered by the *fort-da*. The mother always remains too familiar and too close. In a way, the daughter has her mother under her skin, secreted in the deep, damp intimacy of the body, in the mystery of her relationship to gestation, to birth, and to her sexual identity' (SG 98)

Instead of an object, a little girl requires a quasi-subject to establish herself in relation to her mother, as another subject similar to her, due to their shared ability to engender another boy or girl. It means that boys and girls have different ways of relating to the world around them, and due to this difference they also speak differently, as she stresses here, 'woman always speaks *with* the mother, man speaks in her absence' (SG, 99). What is important here is to focus on her analysis that a boy becomes an autonomous (male) subject and enters a masculine culture by breaking with his mother through the manipulation of an object. As she states elsewhere, 'a boy will have to interpose objects and the construction of an own homocultural and homosocial world, in order to protect himself from the mystery, indeed the abyss, that his origin, his mother, represents for him' (KW, 90). This is how he differentiates himself from his mother and from the natural world around him. Further, the little boy plays with an object which means he is liable to confuse the other with an object:

> ‘the problematic of the object has nothing to do with that of the other … the object is necessary for masculine subjectivity to resolve the difficulty of relating with the mother. Confusing object with the other amounts to including the other in the necessities of one's own subjective construction; it is not yet a question about the other as such’ (CN, 47)

Luce Irigaray’s return to Freud further clarifies her thought on sexuate difference, and further clarifies her position regarding the formation and preservation of a masculine culture. We can see that she is presenting to us the idea that the boy requires an object in order to understand his difference to his mother; she is not present, he must be different to her, and the object serves the function of establishing this difference and his own subjectivity (Whitford, 1991, 44). It also means that he is likely to confuse an other with an object; as he does so with his first relationship to another, his mother. It also means that he is going to have difficulty in establishing a subject to subject relationship especially if that subject is different to him. And collectively, it means that if nature is a collection of objects for him, then women (as mothers) are easily lost in this natural world, leaving him to be the only subject, and all by himself, i.e., alienated.

Luce Irigaray also presents linguistic research to support her philosophical speculations on engendering, bodily relations and sexuate

difference, she is not simply relying on Freud and his case studies. She makes an extensive linguistic analysis of children and adults in multiple languages to demonstrate the difference in how little boys and how little girls speak; and how language functions for adult men and women. By setting simple exercises based on sentence construction with an emphasis on 'the subject speaking, the subject spoken to, the subject spoken about' (KW, 79) she demonstrates some fundamental differences in the language used by children especially. Here I will not go into the research itself, I simply reference Luce Irigaray's research on linguistics as it supports her re-interpretation of Freud and the myth of Antigone which follows.

Luce Irigaray in her essay 'Towards a sharing of speech' shows that boys prefer:

- subject-object relationships,
- relationships with the same as them,
- the one-many configuration,
- hierarchical or family relationships;

And girls prefer:

- relationships between subjects,
- relationships in difference,
- relationships between two persons,
- horizontal relationships.

(KW, 85)

She summarizes, 'boys and girls thus belong to very different relational worlds, and communication between the sexes will be impossible, unless awareness of this difference and respect for it come into the exchange' (KW, 85). Although this research was done with Italian school children, she has, along with co-researchers, done many such linguistic analyses in different countries and languages, with children of different ages.[67] For our purposes here, it would be interesting to consider any similar research with Japanese children, so we might ascertain the sexuate difference noticeable in Japanese language. To my knowledge, no such research exists in translation.[68]

The privileging of objects within a (mono)subject-object relationship is a prejudice according to the masculine subject's needs. The masculine subject privileges the object relation (over the intersubjective) because he requires it to establish himself as separate from his mother and to become an autonomous subject. On the other hand, a woman's relationship to her mother is different to that of a man's; she does not require an object to establish herself as an autonomous subject. She is a subject like her mother: they are the same gender

[67] See for example 'She forgotten between use and exchange' and 'Two of us, outside, tomorrow?' in Luce Irigaray's *i love to you (1996)*

[68] Here it is worth noting the corroborating evidence found by Carol Gilligan, 'my research suggests that men and women may speak different languages that they assume are the same, using similar words to encode disparate experiences of self and social relationships… The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation' (1993, 173)

and they privilege intersubjective relations. For this same reason her relationship to objects (and to others) is different to that of a man's. Luce Irigaray holds that this difference is primordial and does go all the way down to the depths of the constitution of ourselves as subjects.

What we do see from Luce Irigaray's research are two different forms of development for male and female self-consciousnesses (to use Nishitani Keiji's terms). In short, based on her psychoanalytic and linguistic studies, Luce Irigaray wants to establish woman as a positive other to man (Cheah and Grosz, 1998; Jones, 2011; Whitford, 1991). A sexuate specific self-consciousness (again to use Nishitani Keiji's terms) which she terms an I-he and an I-she. If we fail to realise this, the danger of a repetition of alienation and a further fall into nihilism appears inevitable. This means that Nishitani Keiji's analysis of the problem of nihilism is lacking the sexuate dimension of the formation of the I-he and the I-she as two different forms of self-consciousness.

4.6. Thinking through birth with Nishitani Keiji

We can recall above, Nishitani Keiji said we are explicitly born as a human body. We also saw that his choice of term for nature is *Nasci*, to be born. Nishitani Keiji makes some passing comments to birth in relation to nature, our development and our self-consciousness. It is worth asking here then, what role birth plays in his thought? (Because birth is not simply emergence from nature,

even if it is conceived as a becoming and flow which our body is constitutive of.) The role a female or a woman play in this birthing must be recognised, or else women could easily be lost in this becoming and flow and find themselves as vehicles for the emergence of men as self-conscious gatekeepers in a shared patriarchal world of their own making. In other words, if we follow Nishitani Keiji, women could be confused with nature, precisely as Luce Irigaray has analysed.

Above, Nishitani Keiji spoke of the self 'emerging from nature'. Elsewhere and in relation to Spinoza and Goethe and education, he states, '[I] believe that individuals emerge from nature, which is regarded as the creative power' (RE, 72). He goes on:

> 'Nature produces things in an orderly fashion, forming the foundation for education. A baby sucks his mother's breast in harmony with the order of nature. Out of the interrelation of a baby with its mother, infantile emotions develop, which gradually evolve into feelings, affection and gratitude towards parents. The order of nature that presides over the foundation of the relations between individuals forms the basis of education' (RE, 72)

Putting aside for a moment the issues around the language used here,[69] we can see that the relation to one's mother is in fact fundamental for Nishitani Keiji. Not enough is said for us to make too much of his comments, but clearly for him, the individual is born into the world through their mother, and is nurtured by them, which structures our development, and along with our education, forms the basis of interhuman relations; and we might add, perhaps, our later cultivation. He doesn't think this through fully, but it appears that we can easily supplement his thought with Luce Irigaray's.

In his essay '*A departure from the "individual"' (On Buddhism, 2006)*, Nishitani Keiji speaks of the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination and how it relates to our birth. For him:

> 'the reason why I exist lies in my having parents, who were in turn dependent on their parents, and so forth. And to speak of the matter differently, a child becomes a parent, who in turn gives birth to a child, and so forth' (OB, 101)

What is interesting here, is that Nishitani Keiji deflects the issue of the couple into a series of couples.[70] Instead of focusing on the couple in isolation,

[69] The fact that it the male child is sexuately differentiated, for example, and that 'baby' is not sexuately differentiated, showing a prejudice for the neutral and the masculine.
[70] Here we can also notice two important points of criticism, first, is the obvious -lack of sexuation in the terms "parents" and "child" as Nishitani Keiji is using neutral terms. The second point, is that without the sexuate differentiation of a boy and a girl a "child" is also

he creates an interdependent chain of birth which in many respects is infinite, as it extends into past and future, and beyond our historical or objective knowledge. This broadness of vision means that to speak of a couple and birth, is to speak of a great chain of human life, which is tied up with the becoming and flow of nature itself, as well as the sense of self which emerges as self-consciousness and as an "I am". This means that we have an understanding of nature and birth, which if nuanced further by the sexuate difference of Luce Irigaray, offers us a greater insight into the most important of transformations in life, that is birth-sexuation.

Nishitani Keiji also has an interesting point for us concerning self-consciousness or the "I am", the sense of self as a separate individual, for him:

> 'there is behind the phenomena of being another aspect, in accordance with which it can certainly be said that I come out of my parents, but at the same time this is also not the case. For we did not come out of our parents insofar as our being is concerned. For instance, keeping an eye on the fact that "I am," I cannot say even that my parents could possibly have produced this fact, as it really is' (OB, 101)

neutralised, something which Luce Irigaray is keen to avoid in her thought on childhood development.

Our sense of self as an “I am” does not result from our original birth. In a way we could speak of becoming self-conscious as a second birth and realizing ourselves as “I am” as a third birth. We are not born from our mother as such when we mature to a self-conscious self, an ego who can stand aloof from the world of nature as an individual. Nor, are we born from our mother when realise ourselves as “I am”, a transformation which transcends our first, and our second birth. This is similar in a sense to Luce Irigaray’s understanding of the ‘socio-placenta’. This “I am” is our being and he goes so far as to say that it has a shared origin to our parents own sense of “I am”. We are all born again from a shared origin of being. This for him, is perhaps the source of the idea of God or the Buddha. It is a reason for religious thinking on the origin of life, but it is certainly speculative, and it is not well explained.

In my reading of Nishitani Keiji, we are born again when we mature from a baby to a self-conscious self who is aloof from nature. We also undergo a third birth as an “I am”, a mature self-realised human being, who is not only limited to self-consciousness, but realises themselves as a self-awareness, interdependent with all of existence. He or she is a co-constitutive part of all that has ever existed and all that will ever exist. This is the understanding of birth according to *śūnyatā* as an existential relational self-understanding.

In his few comments on birth, Nishitani Keiji ties it to an emergence from nature. The lack of sexuate specificity here is quite clear. Again, without including sexuate difference in nature, focused through the relational nexus of

birth, there is a risk of women being obfuscated with nature, and/or nature remaining neutral. By drawing on the insights of Luce Irigaray, we can fill this lack and make birth a very human affair which considers the sexed specificity of our bodies, our roles in birth, and our relations to others, especially our mother.

On the other hand, Nishitani Keiji's broader horizon is also quite useful when we think of birth. It opens out the timeframe from an event of one individual, to the great flow of human beings as parents and children in a never-ending chain. This cycle of birth is quite helpful to make sure we think in the broadest of terms when we introduce Luce Irigaray's thought. *Ningen* might be a useful concept for understanding our human betweenness, but birth is the most important relational nexus which structures our sense of self as this betweenness.

I would state that we are all born into a great chain of birth and therefore, we can see how the individual is always related to and bound up with the collective, which is between bodies, and masculine and feminine culture in nature. Sexuate difference and *ningen* are therefore, best brought together through our understanding of birth within a re-interpretation of nature as a flux and flow, of which we as sexuate human beings are an important self-aware part. But practically speaking, how are we to become a part of that flux and flow of nature, how are we to realise our sexuate nature directly?

4.7. Self-Cultivation as transdescendence through Zazen

We realise *śūnyatā* as a bodily-knowing. The body is the place of cultivation of a re-envisioned nature and self-consciousness as an "I am": a self that is no-self, enlightened in the sense of Zen. As Yuasa (1987, 25) states, 'to put it simply, true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through "bodily recognition or realisation."' This bodily knowing has been recognised as a shared quality of Japanese and feminist philosophers (McCarthy, 2010; 2014). One such philosopher is Luce Irigaray, for whom, the realisation of bodily-between takes place not through philosophy and words, but by sitting and breathing – in effect, in silence, even if this is then expressed in philosophy (McCarthy, 2010). Through practices of bodily cultivation such as Japanese artistic pursuits or Zen meditation, we come to realise the body as a between place (Yuasa, 1987). For Nishitani Keiji, as we shall see, this is a place or locus that overcomes the nihilism of objectification and mechanisation, by placing itself with one foot in nature and one foot in culture, and then transcending such distinctions.

In the Japanese Zen tradition, as understood by Nishitani Keiji, to come to a true self-understanding (a self which is no longer separate from another, the things of the world and the world as a whole) one must cultivate the relationship of the body and nature through breath meditation or concentration (Yuasa, 1987; Sekida, 1985; Ueda, 1983). As we saw in the introduction, Nishitani Keiji practiced Zazen for most of his adult life, although

he mentions it only occasionally in his writings. However, its importance cannot be underestimated, as he clearly states that it is difficult to understand such Buddhist concepts as *śūnyatā* or Buddhist wisdom in general, unless we practice silent meditation: 'Since the practice of silent meditation is neglected today, it will be difficult to gain such wisdom' (RJ, 40).

Although there are many both gross and subtle variations in its precise method, sitting meditation is considered essential to the Buddhist path. Zazen (Japanese for sitting Zen) is the base practice of Zen (Sekida, 1985, 29). Zazen is made up of two characters in Japanese, the first, *za* is literally 'to set oneself down' or 'to sit', and *zen* (in this case) takes the meaning of centring or recollecting one's self moment by moment (Ueda, 1994). This recollection, is most often facilitated by anchoring our attention on the in and out breath (Sekida, 1985, 53-65; Ueda, 1994).

Nishitani Keiji's references to zazen are few and far between. He explicitly but briefly mentions zazen in 'Cut flowers in Emptiness' (1995 [1975])). His most complete discussion of zazen is found in his later work, 'The significance of Zen in modern society' (1975). Here Nishitani Keiji takes up the last two lines of the Bodhidharma's mythical teaching: 'Pointing directly at man's mind, seeing one's nature and become a Buddha' (SZM, 20)[71] and goes on to give an exposition of the Bodhidharma's mythical slogan in order to offer

[71] The translation that Nishitani uses differs slightly to the one quoted above.

a solution to one of the main problems of contemporary society which we have already come across, alienation (SZM 19-20). It is fascinating that in this article, written when Nishitani Keiji was seventy-five, that he gives his fullest account of zazen, and its goal of a non-dual realization in immediate experience.

Nishitani Keiji's Zen philosophy offers us a solution to the modern predicament of alienation through the practice of zazen. There are four levels working simultaneously: a) doubting oneself, b) investigating oneself, c) giving up oneself, d) returning to oneself. Descartes is the starting point for Nishitani Keiji's philosophical musings. Perhaps the greatest impact which Descartes had on modern philosophy is captured in his method of doubt. Nishitani Keiji here brings the teaching of the Bodhidharma into dialogue with Descartes' on this fundamental philosophical method of doubt. According to Nishitani Keiji, 'a man must turn to himself. Not by force, but by his own initiative and will, he must confront himself for the purpose of self-investigation or search for the self' (SZM, 19). This turning to one's self comes about through a confrontation with the world around us which leads to a doubting of 'things that are given'. He states that one comes to doubt the 'basic elements of our daily experiences, and things traditionally accepted as truths and values' (SZM, 20). For him, we must experience a basic alienation from ourselves (in short, as we have seen nihility) in order to turn outward, when we realize that there is nothing outside us which can satisfy us we are turned back upon ourselves; but, here we are faced once again with what we already know, that nothing inside us can fulfil us.

Doubting, for him, goes further than Descartes' philosophical doubt, because the self itself 'should be taken up and doubted' (SZM, 19). Doubt, therefore, unites the self and the world "below" any sense of a separate self-consciousness. The world around us, the objective world, along with all its values and truths (here we hear the Nietzschean influence in Nishitani Keiji) along with the self, the 'inside' and our 'given' understanding of ourselves, must be doubted:

> 'abandoning them one goes beyond what is usually accepted as the unquestionable framework of our evaluations and thoughts, what, in the Buddhist tradition, is called discrimination or the discriminative mind' (SZM, 20)

This doubting of both self and world, values and truth, takes us beyond the intellect or reason. It leads us beyond Descartes' doubt to where we have no possibility of a return to the self through God, nor any possible return to the self through reason, what we might loosely accept in Buddhist terms as the Buddhist tradition's discursive or discriminating mind. We are left in a place of doubt of both the world at large and ourselves, the inner and the outer combine in a great ball of doubt (SZM). Put succinctly, we fall into nihility. This self which is now in a sea of doubt must therefore be investigated from a different angle than reason or rationality. It is here where the significance of zazen comes into play. Zazen is the means for the investigation of the self which is in doubt; a self that is no longer self-evident. Central to this simultaneous self-investigation and

integration of the self is the breath and its ordering. Sekida (1985, 53-65) agrees with Nishitani Keiji wholeheartedly in his own philosophical inquiry into Zen practice. In Nishitani Keiji we see a joining of philosophical inquiry and Zazen meditation.

For Nishitani Keiji, breathing is the 'most important part' and is not a mere technique but the practice/performance of the non-duality to which zazen aims. In the article 'Cut flowers in Emptiness' (1995) he states 'breathing naturally during zazen … the inhalation and exhalation become as one' and that during zazen 'the person thoroughly identifies with his existence in time' (CF, 24). That is, in this very breath, in this very moment, the person becomes unified with themselves in the dimensions of body (inhalation and exhalation) and self-consciousness.

In brief, the person comes to realise birth and death in each moment; through observing each breath they know birth and death, death and birth, in other words: life (RN, 75). This is the non-dual realization to which *zazen* practice aims. In this first instance it is a non-dual experience of self through the breath and the awareness of time merging into one, one's body and one's self-consciousness dissolve in a single awareness: *śūnyatā* or "I am". It is a momentary glimpse into the nature of reality, through a re-ordering of the relationship between body-mind (Yuasa, 1987, 118-123.) Nishitani Keiji's zazen is as follows:

> ‘zazen or sitting meditation is not a mere technique or a means, but a process of abandoning or cutting off that duality which is preventing one's true self from manifesting itself. This process of sitting and confronting one's self spontaneously by one's own initiative is not something that can be generally described as a psychological state of mind. It is rather the way of self-investigation or self-exploration of man as a total being, or of the total existence of man. The physical and the psychical, body and mind, are gathered in oneness in the posture of sitting in zazen’ (SZM, 20)

The method then is performative and in a sense negative: it is a ‘cutting off’ of a duality which has been “given” to us as our basic existence, i.e., the collective prejudice of a self-consciousness that stands aloof from nature, others and the world. Essentially, the (male?) ego is always setting itself up against the world as a subject opposed to objects, and without the breaking down of this illusory barrier there can be no liberation from ourselves. We have come to doubt the existence of our self and taken up zazen to pass through it. In this practice the duality of inner and outer, self and world, subject and object, is negated (Ueda, 1983). Through a basic sitting posture with an ordered breathing, the false self is dropped, and the true self manifests spontaneously, i.e., naturally.

In short, Zazen practice is transcendence for Nishitani Keiji; we transcend the ignorance of our ego-self and its separation from the world about it: 'one transcends the subject-object duality; one's will, desire and discriminative thinking, on the one hand, and the "realities" of the outer world on the other' *(*SZM, 20). This is the aspect of "giving up one's self", which we can recall is not a nihilation of the self, rather it is a dropping of the separate, and therefore dual, self through an investigation into the whole or total existence of the human being (See Davis, 2013, 190). This results in a non-duality of our self and the world, as Nishitani Keiji states: 'to transcend one's duality of existence … means to abandon one's self-being and to give up one's ego. As long as there is an ego, there is also something other than ego which means duality' (SZM, 20). The dropping of the ego refers to a non-dual realization of our self on another level, one which Nishitani Keiji terms our whole being or total existence, or our true self, or no-self or the "I am".[72]

Interestingly, even though this non-dual overcoming is now complete, in Nishitani Keiji we find another stage, the final stage of "returning to oneself". This occurs simultaneously with the doubting of our self and world, the investigation of our self through zazen and the dropping of the ego. We must remember that these "stages" cannot really be seen only causally they must also be seen simultaneously. A transformation takes place: 'returning to oneself is not to be understood as a procedure on the ego-level, as an egoistic, self-centred

[72] This use of different names for the self, as I have already pointed out, attempts to keep alive the spontaneity of that exploration and avoid the fixation of the self in a particular name with a corresponding conceptual understanding. It is problematic philosophically, but in terms of Zen practice it is highly desirable.

movement' (SZM, 20). For Nishitani Keiji the returning to one's true self is captured by the second part of the Bodhidharma's phrase "seeing one's nature and become a Buddha". It means 'to ask the basic question of who and what am I, and realize one's own Buddha nature … to see one's original face' (SZM, 23). This is not an abstract or theoretical questioning, it is one which takes place through 'daily active life, moving, sitting, looking at flowers, and it returns after all this to the same daily life' (SZM, 23).

The transcendence of duality that Nishitani Keiji is speaking of is a transcendence that never departs from this very immediate existence of our everyday lives and that which we are. In translation it is rendered as 'transdescendence'.[73] Transdescendence returns us most fully to an integrated and whole self, deeply connected to the world around us, or more precisely, interpenetrating the world and all about us as we ourselves are too interpenetrated in a simultaneous reciprocal constitution of a body and nature, self and other, self and world. Transdescendence then, is another word for the realisation of *śūnyatā* in the body.

Transdescendence is the seeing of one's self with a greater self-awareness which is being spoken of here but a self-awareness which comes to the point of 'seeing oneself in the self-awareness of Buddha' (SZM, 23). It is to literally drop one's own ego centred self and to be reborn in a sense through the

[73] Scholars such as Van der Braak (2012) and Davis (2013, 197-198) interpret this as an immanent-transcendence.

same insight of the Buddha so that one realizes the truth of the Buddha's path in one's own non-dual body-mind-world. As he states elsewhere, 'In Zen Buddhism there is a belief that the Buddha's enlightenment can be directly attained with a person's living body … the Buddha dharma is immediately realised in the sensory realm' (RJ, 41). The body itself is radically transfigured by practice and insight, which then informs the presentation of a philosophical exposition.

If we think of terms such as body and mind, when we use these terms we compartmentalise ourselves and our world into two, we identify with one more than the other. We have a prejudice to one or the other or make some trade-off between them (Yuasa, 1987, 118-123). However, in Nishitani Keiji's thought, they are both one and the same. Using *Dōgen*'s: 'Zazen signifies that body and mind drop out' (SZM, 21) Nishitani Keiji makes clear that this is not a realization through what we may call our ordinary body and mind which then simply returns to this same ordinary body and mind after our navel gazing enlightenment moment. It is rather that through forgetting one's self, one returns to one's self, or put another way 'the movement of letting them drop out simultaneously means to regain them' (SZM, 21). This realization of body-dropping off, of the ego-self falling away, is immediate, without time, wholly simultaneous across the four stages we have analysed here. Nishitani Keiji sums up:

> ‘The whole process begins with one's own reality as a living self. After “forgetting” oneself and transcending everything, one returns once more to the reality of that self. The important point is that at no point is one detached *[i.e., creating a further dualism]* from that basic reality, from the immediacy of that reality. At no point do one's feet leave the ground, so to speak’ (SZM, 23)[74]

This moment of realization is one thoroughly grounded in the everyday world, which at the same time transcends this ordinary world as dualistic, the self returns in a new transformed way but at no point did we leave this world to another transcendent realm; there is no *deus ex machina* to resolve our existential alienation; there is no need for an absolute transcendent other who comes to us gracing us with salvation; we made our own error and we can realise it for ourselves through our own self-understanding. We go down through the body. What is in effect, a ‘transdescendence’; rather than a transcendence. This realization takes place as a simultaneous realization of one's self and reality; reality and one's self (RN, 5).[75] It is a radical re-appreciation of our existence, which is the purpose of religion and the necessity of our times in the face of nihilism.

However, if transdescendence takes us down through the body, then surely the sexed nature of that body is relevant? I would consider it necessary

[74] My emphasis.
[75] See also Davis (2013, 190)

for any immanent transcendence to take into consideration the sexuate difference of nature, body, and self-consciousness, as Luce Irigaray's thought forces us to do this. It cannot be simply bypassed. It is for this reason that Luce Irigaray's thought is so important for us here. The question is, can we reconcile transdescendence with Luce Irigaray's own understanding of immanent transcendent also realised through bodily practices?

4.8. Self-cultivation of the sexuate body-breath

The education of our body and the breath are fundamental to the cultivation of ourselves as sexuate human beings for Luce Irigaray. Practices from Yoga and Tantra are dimensions which she finds lacking on our own culture, and they show a different attitude towards self-cultivation (DBT 113; BEW; TVB 25; TBB 14). In her discussion of a child's growth, she comments on the complex process of moving from crawling to standing:

> 'This really complex endeavour seems to go without saying for us Westerners, and if certain cultures, notably Eastern ones amongst which those of the yoga tradition, help us to cultivate the passage of the body from one position to another in relation to gravity, its situation in space, its sensory perceptions, especially the visual ones, instead our tradition does not care much about these sorts of questions, which are nevertheless crucial in order to discover a centring that takes place in the

> individual and allows it to reach a suitable constitution and autonomy … this centring has not been considered seriously enough by our culture as an element crucial in structuring subjectivity' (TBB, 14-15)

This is one of the few places where Luce Irigaray relates Yogic practice to her own views of childhood development and human cultivation. It is clear this is about practices concerning the body and not the intellect. In fact, it has been noted that Luce Irigaray is looking for a return to the body through these practices, and that she is not necessarily looking for the same results as the traditions themselves (Sokhtan Yeng, 2013, 211). The importance of self-cultivation through the body, as a part of a child's growth, and our own adult maturation is clearly paramount for her, as it is "crucial in structuring our subjectivity." Likewise, the breath is vitally important.

Our first breath, taken at birth, is the link from our origin, to life, to our body, and to the cultivation of ourselves as autonomous human beings: 'Breathing corresponds to the first autonomous gesture of the living human body' (BEW, 73) and, 'it is our first and last gesture of life' (BEW, 73). In her essay *The way of breath (2002)* Luce Irigaray draws on Yogic wisdom to elucidate this link of breath and life.[76] It is because we do not understand the breath that we cannot understand life:

[76] Contrary to Sokthan Yeng (2013) I see these practices as Yogic and Tantric and only minimally influenced by Buddhism as I shall argue in the following chapter.

> ‘breathing is what permits us not only to live by ourselves but also to transcend a mere survival, to overcome the stage of a mere vitality so that we become able to achieve a human existence’ (TBB, viii)

Sexuate difference along with the breath, is the focus of her thought for our cultivation in-tune with our natural belonging. This the path of self-cultivation woven between East and West as found in Luce Irigaray’s thought (TBB, viii). Even the breath is sexuated:

> ‘faithfulness requires each individual to correspond with a concrete finiteness through its sexuate belonging. The specificity of its sexuation is what acts as a finiteness inherent or immanent in nature which provides each with its limits, measure and economy, including breathing – thus a life of its own’ (TBB, 3)

The cultivation of the breath in Yogic and Tantric practice is called *pranayama* (Feuerstein, 2013, 121). Etymologically, this word is made up of two words, *prana* and *ayaama* (Feuerstein, 2011, 74). *Prana* is usually translated as vital force, or energy (Feuerstein 2013, 121; 2011, 74). *Prana* is, in effect, a similar understanding to *Chi* or *Ki* as found in Chinese or Japanese thought (Feuerstein, 2010, 351). Erin McCarthy (2014), drawing on the thought of Yasuo

Yasua (1993) has noted the importance of this concept for understanding Japanese philosophy and non-dual subjectivity. Luce Irigaray is often using the term energy alongside her discussions of the breath and its cultivation. We find this more and more in her later works and especially her most recent publications.[77]

Furthermore, in his *The Psychology of Yoga* Georg Feuerstein *(2013, 127)* relates this term *prana* or energy to Freud's libido, or bioenergy, in the psychoanalytic tradition. We can highlight specifically Wilhelm Reich's orgone theory as one of the principle offshoots of Freudian thought which is very similar to this understanding of life-energy as all pervasive (Feuerstein, 2013, 127; Feuerstein, 2010, 249). Reich referred to it under many names, and at one time, he used the vegetative. However, I read this term energy in accordance with Asian understandings of *prana* or *chi*. When Luce Irigaray speaks of energy in her writings therefore, I consider it is this *prana* as understood in the Yogic and Tantric traditions which she is speaking of. I think she has carefully played on this term and its meanings within her poetic evocation of breath as a universal path of cultivating the vegetal, energy, the divine or mother energy.

The vegetal, a term she shares with Michael Marder, and with whom she co-authors one of her most recent works *Through Vegetal Being (2016)* is an understanding of nature as living, which she finds in this plant-thinking or

[77] There are many references scattered throughout BEW; TVD; TBB.

vegetal being, and which appears in many ways to be a re-interpretation of energy and self-generation. We might say, *Jinen*. For her, 'nature, contrary to a fabricated object, moves by itself towards its blossoming' (TVB, 13). It is self-generative or has its own potentialities which can be fostered and cultivated in our own case as human beings. For her, the vegetal is a place she has lived with for a long time as she states:

> 'the vegetal world is, from my infancy, what allowed me to survive, but also to find the roots of life again after the expulsion from my social environment that followed the publication of Speculum' (TVB, 5)

For her, the vegetal is a place where one is intimate with plant life, trees and the green world that surrounds us and holds us in what was traditionally objectified and conceptualised as nature, and as separate to us. The key difference in conceptualising nature according to scientific understanding or idealism, is seen here as intimacy and living with the vegetal, which is for her essential to survival and becoming (TVB, 7). Going even further, we could say that as human beings, in order to cultivate ourselves, we must grow alongside and with our counterparts in the vegetal world. It is a return to nature in the sense of a meditation in and with nature understood as the self-generating vegetal that is our natural counterpart and home.

Intimacy then is not to be understood as an intellectual position, but rather a living experiential position which Luce Irigaray is trying to speak from. Our cultivation is one of flourishing in its classical sense as growth, fulfilling our potential, or even better: blossoming, and where we do not split ourselves off from nature (TVB, 26). It is for this reason that her use of the image of the Buddha contemplating a flower, as we shall see later, is suitable to bring across her message of the vegetal, hidden in words – as a man sits in silence, intimate with the living-world around him (ILTY; BEW).

This practice of contemplating a living-plant or tree is one of the specific practices she mentions in her texts, and it was something which she connected to masters of the East such as the Buddha, and Krishnamurti, who sat under trees or spoke of flowers and flowering as literal examples of the flowering of our own self-unfolding (BEW; TVB, 26). We see in this process of cultivation, a clear parallel between her thought and Nishitani Keiji's. It is our natural spontaneous unfolding which is hindered by the mechanised and objectified form of development found in contemporary cultivation.

For Luce Irigaray, our natural rhythms of growth are mechanised. This is for her the case with modern culture, where we she expresses the difference between nature's rhythms and mechanical rhythms in our childhood development:

> ‘Instead of being really concerned with integrating the different stages of our becoming human, subjectivity has been constituted only from certain aspects: those capable of dominating natural growth through categories and principles which are imposed on it from the outside or from on high as modalities presumed suitable for human development … [the little human] will be asked to submit its natural growth to meta-physical requirements already defined, the origin of which are not in its body: a thing that will paralyze its growth and tear it between a motion of which it is the source as living being and other movements to which it is subjected and which transform it into a sort of fabricated product, the mechanical functioning of which is dependent on an energy external to it, at least in part’ (TVB, 15)

The child growing up in a culture of mechanization based on a meta-physics which is contrary to his or her origin and self-generation, i.e., his or her natural rhythm creates a fabricated object, not a living human being. Similarly, a culture which is predominantly masculine, or neutral, will impinge on the self-generation of female subjectivity by distorting her rhythm or by not facilitating her growth according to her own rhythm. Male and female are relationally different, they grow differently according to their rhythm and relation to nature and culture, and they become human depending on the processes of cultivation available to them.

Importantly, this relates to the practices of self-cultivation which we find in Luce Irigaray's thought. The practice of self-cultivation would also play out differently through our different bodies, which are also parts of nature as a whole. She even goes so far as to say that men and women may breathe differently, and she is cautious about adopting some of the tantric and yogic practices which may be more appropriate for men than for women (BEW; CON). Nature and culture are bridged by a re-interpretation of nature as a fluid whole, and a living body that never departs from that whole, while it engages in shared cultural activities, which are based on the differences between male and female bodies in relation to the flux and flow of nature and the net of a shared culture. Self-cultivation then, must also be in-tune with the sexed difference of male and female bodies, or, it may fall into a mechanical form of alienation.

Prana is sometimes called the divine energy, or mother energy, and is represented by the goddess Shakti, (Feuerstein, 2013, 124-127; Swami Gitananda, 2008, 2-3). This energy, this material which is also infused by something pre-material, a life power, is the divine as feminine power in action. The divine feminine power is called Shakti and is also coupled with the god *Śiva*. This coupling, especially in the divine coupling of *Śiva* and Shakti, is understood to be the highest model of the Tantric tradition (Feuerstein, 1998, 77-84). As we saw above, this divine coupling is important to our understanding of the body, breath, nature and culture in the micro-macrocosm model that Luce Irigaray puts forward.

Pranayama specifically can be understood as the extension, or sometimes science of control of prana through breathing practices (Feuerstein, 2011, 74). It refers to understanding and/or altering the breath through techniques or methods of cultivation (Feuerstein, 2011, 69-73). In *between east and west (2002)* Luce Irigaray states that, 'The practice of respiration, the practice of diverse kinds of breathing certainly reduces the darkness or the shadows of Western consciousness' (2002, 7). Her appeal to Eastern practices to supplement her own philosophical and psychoanalytic studies and practices is crucial for us to understand her philosophical project. Clearly, the cultivation of the breath is taken from Yogic and Tantric practice. This is a process of divinisation of the body, 'for the masters of the East, the body itself can become spirit through the cultivation of breathing' (BEW, 7) and this divinisation of the flesh is one of the main lessons she learned from Yoga and Tantra. This allowed her to re-read or understand or relate her intuitions of the philosophical and Christian tradition and its relation to the body and the breath. For Luce Irigaray, one of the fundamental lessons learned from Yoga is a different mode of approaching 'life, others and teaching' which 'supposes and accompanies a singular experience of the body' (BEW, 60). She states clearly:

> 'The tradition of Yoga, the Tantric tradition and certain meetings with spiritual women and men have taught me … that the body is itself a divine place – the place or temple of the divine in harmony with universe – or rather they have taught me how to cultivate my body, and to respect that of others, as divine temples' (BEW, 61)

She had already intuited this from her understanding of the Christian tradition, but it was through Yoga that she learnt how to cultivate this intuition:

> 'Through practicing breathing, through educating my perceptions, through concerning myself continually with cultivating the life of my body, through reading current and ancient texts of the yoga tradition and Tantric texts, I learned what I knew: the body is the site of the incarnation of the divine and I have to treat it as such' (BEW, 62)

For her, 'without doubt, at the origin of our tradition – for Aristotle, for example, and still more for Empedocles – the soul still seems related to the breath, to air. But the link between the two was then forgotten, particularly in philosophy.' (BEW, 7) This link, between the body, the breath and the soul, is the pathway towards the divinisation of the body. It was lost in philosophy, through conceptualisations and representations. But, for her, it is the missing link for us in order to understand and restore the bridges between traditions, East and West.

Luce Irigaray's philosophy between East and West, and her orientation towards practice and process of cultivation is best captured by the term 'way' rather than 'philosophy'. We find it also in the title of the book *The Way of Love*

(2002), where she also interprets philosophy to mean the wisdom of love (2002, 1). And, which is concerned with 'the whole of the human and not only that mental part of ourselves' (2002, viii). There is a clear link to the Asian understanding of cultivation as a way, that is *Marga* in yogic thought, or *Tao* or *Do* in Chinese or Japanese thought respectively. As we have seen already, with Zen meditation, these traditions often have a detailed understanding of the breath, its rhythms, its effects on the body, the emotions, the thinking process and our awareness. This has been cultivated over many thousands of years and is still a living tradition in several areas of the world. These paths of cultivation are often referred to as ways of life, and in fact, we can take this in its most literal sense here: for Luce Irigaray, breathing is the way of life.

Once again, even the practice of the breath points towards this being between traditions as a place for cultivation of ourselves as human beings. It is not that we must overcome the body, or that the body is fallen, or mere matter to be transcended, or that is just chemical reactions and neural impulses, the body itself is a temple for the divine which is brought out through the breath, it:

> 'blossoms, becomes more subtle and totally sensible. This transformation, transubstantiation of elementary corporeal matter into spiritual flesh, is achieved particularly through the passage of energy from certain chakras – or psycho-physiological centres – to others: thus from chakras of sexual energy or of elementary vitality to those of the heart, of the throat, of the head, without forgetting the return circulation

all the way down to the feet. All this alchemy of the becoming of the subtle body is described in certain texts such as the Upanishads of yoga and also in certain Tantric manuals as well as in the teaching of Patanjali on concentration and perception. Everything is not said there, everything is not yet said there as I have sometimes believed. But instructions about the transformations of the body in union with the totality of the universe and its possible incarnations are given' (BEW, 62-63)

In this passage, there is no doubt as Joy (2006), Sokhtan Yeng (2014) and Deutscher (2002) have recognised: that the influence of Tantra pervades her thought. Finally, Luce Irigaray expresses her desire to see these teachings on the breath and the body, in the cultivation of love between two freedoms, something which is lacking in the Westernised take on them. For her, 'often, love is presented there as a union, regressive in a way but ecstatically spiritual, of man with the universal womb that woman would incarnate, chosen as *shakti*.' (BEW, 63) For her, this is better than bestial love, but it is not without the need for re-interpretation. For her:

'the union of two lovers, woman or man, can contribute to the rebirth of the other as both human and divine incarnation. In this case, the carnal union becomes a privileged place of individuation and not only of fusion, of regression, or of the abolition of polarities and differences. In love, women and men give back to one another their identity and the potential for life and creation that the difference of identity between

them makes possible. This doubly identity allows them to remain two in love, and in adult relations of reciprocity' (BEW, 64)

The carnal dimension of her thought is outside the scope of this thesis, but she has been criticised for her selective use of Tantra (Sokhtan Yeng, 2013; Joy, 2006). For Luce Irigaray, the way of breath is the way of life. For her, just as we are all born, we also all breathe, it is the first gesture we share, and it is the fundamental path for the cultivation of our life. It is, therefore, the universal path for the cultivation of our selves, as a living-being and as a spiritual being, beyond mere nature as an objective and mechanical thing, towards a living-nature of the vegetative. To summarise, I quote a very autobiographical statement at length:

'breathing is what allows for a passage from the vegetative life to the spiritual life. Thanks to the vegetal world, I could not only begin living again but also continue thinking. "There is air" was sufficient; I did not need another "there is." A new start and a new world were possible without any other than breathing, and so, little by little, opening in myself a clearing made of a reserve of free breath, in which I was capable of perceiving and shaping that which I perceived. At first, I could, above all, affirm "It is not that" and put in question the truth that my tradition taught me. I crossed a sort of negative ontology. It is not that which has been passed on to me as truth that allows me to live and to think; the

essential function of air and of breath has been forgotten as the mediation for both living and transcending a mere natural life' (TVB, 22)

As sexuate human beings we live between the vegetal and the divine (TBB, vi). The relational complexity of human development is found in its many relations and as a difference:

'A human being must give itself a being with faithfulness to the living that it is. In a way it must create its human being through relating to the world and the other(s) – be they plants, animals or humans – thus a being in relation which requires us not to be what they are while being able to be in relation to and with what they are, that is, capable of taking on the negative that the difference represents' (TBB, vi)

For her, a human being:

'does not at once live in the space and the time which suit it; it comes into the world separating off from its first vital roots, and it is little by little that it will have to find, to elaborate and to construct a place which takes into account its natural potentialities and permits it to cultivate them towards a human blooming which corresponds to them' (TVB, 9-10)

This practical and poetic new way of philosophising based on the breath as our fundamental existence and air as that natural support that grounds our being provides a free place within ourselves from where we can negate that which is not our self, that which is not true, that on which we do not need to depend. It is, as we saw above, a negative ontology grounded in breathing air, which provides an energetic space within from which to think in a new way. Clearly, as Sokthan Yeng points out, Luce Irigaray is greatly influenced by practices of cultivating the breath and meditation as found in the Yogic traditions (2014, 66, 70-71). However, she doesn't teach any actual techniques for cultivating the breath and *prana* in her texts. There is no technical understanding put forward; but, when we read her essays on the breath, there is a sense of pointing us towards listening to the breath as we listen to words, the sound of the birds, or silence. They do therefore, raise our awareness. One of Krishnamurti's "techniques" was to point us towards the space between the words in his speech, the silence between. The text itself does act as a kind of meditation therefore, and she does perhaps inspire us to take up Yoga or to walk in the open air enjoying nature, through her words and her poetic weavings.

4.9. Re-integrating nature, body and practice

In this chapter I have shown that there are three clear points of convergence in the philosophies of Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray. The first, is the attempt to re-integrate culture with nature through a re-interpretation of

our natural belonging. The second, is the need for Eastern practices to fulfil a perceived lack in the Western philosophical tradition, and to facilitate that integration. The third, is the body as the place of self-cultivation which brings about a re-integration with nature, and it's re-interpretation. Of course, the fundamental difference here is the sexed specificity of the body, nature and culture, as seen in Luce Irigaray's thought.

We have seen that a re-integration with nature, through the body, is crucial for us to reach a relational self-understanding, and overcome our nihilistic cultural trend. Historically, in European culture, the masculine perspective has prevailed which was established by cutting off from nature (and the body) and manipulating it. In this respect, Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji are in a basic agreement, but in respect to why this has happened we can see a clear difference between them. For Luce Irigaray, conceptualising nature as a whole is potentially nihilistic (TVB, 6), hence her thought on the vegetal as a re-interpretation of a certain way that 'nature' grows and blossoms is more favourable. By taking refuge (a very Buddhist term) in the vegetal world, Luce Irigaray is able to ground her thought of sexuate difference in living-nature, for her, life itself is 'necessarily sexuate' (TVB, 5). Human beings are sexed through their bodies where they are entwined with nature. In other words, nature has this potential for sexuation, which human beings fulfil. When Luce Irigaray says nature is two, what she means really is that human beings are sexed, male and female and this relies on the sexuation inherent to them as a part of nature (Cheah and Grosz, 1998, 6-8).

Eastern practices can help us to reach our natural and spontaneous self-nature (*jinen*). However, any such down going or transdescendence must be inclusive of the insight of sexuate difference. This is because transdescendence never leaves the body, it is a down going, and therefore, must pass though sexuate difference. Moreover, sexuate difference can help us to establish ourselves and our natural belonging in the process of growth towards a maturity that is capable of transdescendence. This natural belonging can be phrased in terms of an I-he and an I-she, if the dominant culture of mechanisation and objectification is carefully and cautiously moved beyond.

Furthermore, even these techniques of self-cultivation are influenced by the masculine or feminine interpretation of them, and breath itself may be different for male and female bodies (understood as relational). We must therefore, be cautious about appropriating these practices because of their effect on our self-cultivation, and whether this will facilitate our natural becoming further, or hinder it. A practice of self-cultivation must also be inclusive of sexuate difference, or at least be aware of the effect this practice might have on our sexuate understanding of ourselves as relational bodies. The danger once more is again that sexuate difference may be neutralised by bodily practices which do not take it fully into consideration. One of the main dangers here is the non-dualism inherent to Nishitani Keiji's philosophy of *Śūnyatā,* which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

According to Luce Irigaray, each and everything has a rhythm and flow which approximates to the two primary forces of male and female, in the eyes of some traditions of human beings, who themselves differentiate implicitly or explicitly because of sexuate difference. Sexuate difference, of which humans are the most complex manifestation, guarantees the dualistic perspective on nature, and a holistic way of understanding the interplay of forces in the vegetal, the animal and the human worlds. The focus on interchange of rhythms guarantees this difference within nature and suggests we cannot conceptualise it as a whole; at best we can interpret it as two, and this will support a reality of a web of differences. Without this differentiation, for Luce Irigaray, there is a danger that we once more fall into a nihilistic understanding based on everything being the same.

Although I think in many ways Nishitani Keiji would appreciate the detailed exposition of rhythms between the different entities in the natural world, he himself does not go into such specificity. *Śūnyatā* is once more the broadest possible understanding of the interchange and flux and flow of all things. It does not explicitly include sexuate difference, and it may, therefore, neutralise it and potentially reduce it to the same. However, with a heightened awareness of sexuate difference, there is no reason why it cannot be included in this understanding of reality as *Śūnyatā*. In fact, I think it needs to be included, if we are to make *ningen* harmonious with sexuate difference, from nature and the body, up into culture, and any form of liberated existence.

Human beings are a part of nature, they are a self-aware part which brings about culture. Our realisation of this is the self-awareness of reality as 'our becoming aware of reality and, at the same time, the reality realising itself in our awareness' (RN, 5). We can recall James Heisig's point here that:

> 'the standpoint of emptiness, then, is not so much a philosophical "position" as it is the achievement of an original self-awareness (our self-nature), compared to which all other consciousness is caught in the fictional darkness of ignorance, or what the Buddhists call avidya' (2001, 223)

And as we saw, for Nishitani Keiji:

> '*śūnyatā* is the point at which we become manifest in our own suchness as concrete human beings, as individuals with both body and personality. And at the same time, it is the point at which everything around us becomes manifest in its own suchness' (RN, 90)

Śūnyatā is therefore, at once reality (including the human social world and nature) and the horizon of interpretation. Sexuate difference must be held within this broad open horizon of self-awareness. It is what ties us to our natural belonging and allows us to flourish as an I-he and/or an I-she, without this

broader understanding, there is a danger that sexuate difference will slip into a nihilism of essentialism, where self-consciousness becomes reified as something, instead of being a point of awareness, or a standpoint from where we interpret the world of which we are an integral part. In short, an I-he and/or an I-she, must become a non-he and/or a non-she. That is, by going down through the sexuate body, we return to a sexuate body, albeit a transfigured one.

5

THE BUDDHA AND THE FLOWER

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall expand on the practice of self-cultivation by looking at how Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji attempt to overcome nihilism through a new perceptual model. This model is based around a subject looking at flowers. The example of looking at flowers is found in several of Luce Irigaray's writings where she uses the Buddha for her model of seeing the vegetal, nature and life itself. In Nishitani Keiji, it is the Japanese art of Ikebana which is an example of a different way of seeing and experiencing ourselves in relation to the natural. These two examples of looking at flowers serve as a case study on how each philosopher tries to re-interpret the world and to re-invigorate self-understanding with a new perceptual model between East and West.

The crux of the problem shall arise here when we compare these two examples. The non-self, as understood by Nishitani Keiji, is a self which is situated on a field of *śūnyatā*, which is, as we have seen in the introduction, a field of non-dualism, where the subject and object, or the internal and external, are united in a double exposure – what we might call layers or levels of existence. Luce Irigaray has expressed concerns with non-dualism as found in Yoga and *Patañjali* (CN, 38). Her concern is that any form of oneness is a neutralisation of everything to the same and will result in the eradication of sexuate difference and therefore, nihilism (CN, 39-41). We might expect then that this non-dual experience of *śūnyatā* is one which Luce Irigaray would be uncomfortable with.

On the one hand, we shall see that Nishitani Keiji's example of looking at a flower might offer an avenue for a new model for man to emulate, which gives space for the emergence of a female subject and a feminine culture to emerge (because man will release his possessiveness of woman as an object, if he realises himself as a no-self.) On the other hand, we shall see that, Nishitani Keiji's Zen standpoint might go too far by ignoring the role of sexuate difference, thereby defeating the very purpose of Luce Irigaray's passage between traditions.

What I want to propose here in this chapter is a model inclusive of sexuate difference, but grounded on *śūnyatā*; understood not as a dissolution of differences into oneness (what Nishitani Keiji would call nihility) but rather,

as a possibility for two different kinds of sexuate subject (I-he/I-she) who are fundamentally non-attached (or what I call the non-he/non-she) i.e., to begin to flesh out an understanding of the non-self (in Nishitani Keiji's terms) or pure subjects (in Luce Irigaray's terms) to exist together on the field of *śūnyatā* while being sexuately differentiated.

5.2. Luce Irigaray's Buddha looking at a flower

Luce Irigaray's image of the Buddha looking at a flower is I think a significant turning point in her thought, where we see an explicit Eastern influence in her texts. Consider her statement that, 'Buddha's contemplation of the flower suggests that we learn to perceive the world around us, that we learn to perceive each other between us: as life, as freedom, as difference' (TBT, 23). This change in our perception, through such a contemplation, allows the perception of life, freedom and difference (dare we say even sexuate difference?) The example of the "Buddha looking at a flower" occurs in three of Luce Irigaray's most significant works: *i love to you (1996), to be two (2000)* and *between east and west (2002)*.[78] As we can see they correspond to the middle-later period of her work. In these works, Luce Irigaray brings the image of the Buddha looking, contemplating and gazing at a flower into conversation with the thought of Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-ponty, Levinas and Simone de Beauvoir, and, at the same time, she engages with several problems and

[78] During this period, Luce Irigaray does not capitalise the first word of her book titles.

questions from the Western philosophical tradition. She usually does not make this explicit for the reader, and she tends to homogenise the Western philosophical tradition, just as much as she might homogenise the "East" (Deutscher, 2002, 149).[79] My work here is not in locating the invisible interlocutors, or examining the philosophical problems she is engaging with; unless it relates directly to the Buddha imagery, and my juxtaposition of her work with Nishitani Keiji's.

It is not a traditional or scholarly interpretation of the Buddha which Luce Irigaray makes and brings into dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition; rather, it is a novel interpretation that, for her, attempts to remain true to the Buddha's gestures, invigorating the Buddha's teaching appropriately for our own time and its problems, such as an inability to perceive the vegetal, life and sexuate difference. In short, it is a model for a man to find a new way of seeing living-things in the world, thereby simultaneously changing his relation to objects, and therefore, necessarily his sense of self as a subject. It is a new way of perceiving in relation which overcomes the isolation of objectification and nihilism.

For Luce Irigaray the Buddha can serve as a model for our self-cultivation because he did not reject life, nor his body. What she draws out from his life of renunciation is that he rejected his social world of constructed objects.

[79] For a critique of Luce Irigaray's homogenization of women see also the 'Introduction' in Deutscher (2002).

For her, we see this through his gesture of living in the forest (BEW, 35-36). He renounced the social world in order to return to the natural world (BEW, 35-36). He intended to live in the forest, so he could be silent and breathe according to his own rhythm and in tune with the cosmic rhythm (BEW, 35-36). As Luce Irigaray states:

> 'The quest of the Buddha seems to me to correspond to the search for a continuous communion with the respiration of the macrocosm. In order to attain such fluidity, the Buddha renounces the punctuality, the discontinuity, of objects and, moreover, of discourses. He tries to become pure subject but on a model forgotten by us: pure subject means here breathing in tune with the breathing of the entire living universe' (BEW, 35-36)

As we saw in the introduction, for Luce Irigaray our subjectivity is our transcendence: that which can never be seen or known by our self or by another. I think we can say that it is cultivating this which Luce Irigaray is suggesting when she speaks of becoming a pure subject. The Buddha as a pure subject is one who is in fluid relation with the living world around him. It is once again, a micro-macro model, through which cultivating our breath in relation to the natural world we can re-integrate ourselves into the macrocosm. To be close to that which he really is, the Buddha must come closer to the living world, the natural world, where he can find his own rhythm of breath alongside and with the living universe. This idea of finding his own rhythm is important, as we saw

in chapter four, because we each have our own rhythm, and this is a natural dimension of our existence.

For Luce Irigaray, objects and words take us away from our own rhythm; punctuating it, making it discontinuous, and therefore, disharmonious. The Buddha's renunciation, according to her, is one of renouncing constructed objects because they take us away from our own rhythmic breath, and the rhythm of the living world, or we might say the vegetal:

> 'Renunciation, for the Buddha, represents the way of access to continuity and to harmony. To practice renunciation does not signify, for him, sacrificing oneself for a hypothetical immortality or eternity but bringing them here and now. Such work cannot be carried out in a purely speculative manner, which is another Western error in the interpretation of the Buddha's teaching. He never separated himself from the economy of the living universe, notably the vegetal' (BEW, 35-36)

The return to the living-world, which means the renunciation of discourse and objects, and the return to the forest where he can breathe according to his own rhythm, is for Luce Irigaray the most important gesture of the Buddha (BEW, 35-36). The Buddha does not go outside of himself to find immortality or eternity, he returns to himself through breathing with the living-world, and he always remains in the sensible (See also CN, 43). The problem is

that all objects make us partial:

> 'If he renounces – at least according to our perspective – it is because the objects of desire, the objective correlates of my subjective desires, oppose harmony with the universal breath. They tear me to pieces' (BEW, 35)

The desire for a constructed thing outside of myself; through a partiality such as the perception of vision, and the organ of vision, as Luce Irigaray says, tears me to pieces: the object partializes me, through my visual perception and desire, it removes me from my wholeness, and my own rhythm. It makes my cultivation as a living subject impossible. It is for this reason that Luce Irigaray thinks that 'the Buddha renounces every object, the object always being partial, nonabsolute, a cause of conflicts, sorrows' (BEW, 36).

For Luce Irigaray, the major difference is found between an object and a living-thing. The Buddha looking at a flower is completely different to someone walking down the street and seeing a car. A flower is a living-thing, which does not partialize him, allowing him to remain in himself, while breathing, or coming closer to the natural-living world on a greater scale (CN, 43). By returning to the forest, the Buddha comes back to himself as a living-being among living-beings. He can therefore cultivate himself, eventually to a macrocosmic level in his attempt to become a pure subject. The Buddha as a

pure subject, therefore, is not attached to manufactured objects, and in himself as a living-being he is whole – beyond desire and joined with the universal breath. Her interpretation of the Buddha is essentially a model for man to overcome his attachment to, and domination of objects, so that he might become that which he really is – a living pure subject.

The Buddha renounces the constructed world and returns to the vegetal (living world). In doing so, he renounces all objects (constructed things), and instead he attempts to cultivate himself as a pure subject: through his breath and his relation to the vegetal. Luce Irigaray does not explain the concept of a "pure subject" clearly. Here I attempt to elucidate it from the little she does say. A pure subject is not the same as becoming an abstract subject. The Buddha is not becoming a disembodied neutral subject, an "I" with no body – that is the philosophical subject of the Western world – the thinking thing of Descartes for example. Instead, he attempts to become a pure subject, unified with the macrocosmic and the microcosmic, while remaining in his body, in tune with his breath and in silence – what she calls en-stasis (CN, 41). The critical problem from the perspective of sexuate difference lies with gender and objectivity. As we saw earlier, our subjectivity is our transcendence, and it is always coupled to our primary objectivity which is our gender, as a bodily and spoken relational difference to our mother. To become a pure subject, according to Luce Irigaray, we must breathe in harmony with our own rhythm and the cosmos. In the Buddha's case this means *he* must breathe according to *his* own rhythm: the Buddha, is still a man. According to her own thought, a subject is always male or female and any pure subject must also cultivate him or herself as a female or

a male. This is what she calls the cultivation of our sexuate belonging or sexuation (TBB, viii). Her question therefore is, can we remain as two human beings, sexuate difference being the paradirm, while entering this state of contemplation? (CN, 41). In-line with her thought of sexuate difference, we can say that as a male subject the Buddha attempts to become a pure male subject; but if he attempts to become a pure subject breathing to some non-gendered rhythm, then he shall inevitably fail. *He* must breathe according to *his* own rhythm to become a (non-attached/partialized) pure (male) subject. And from this we must assume that a woman has her own path to any such enstasis. We shall return to this later.

5.3. The flower as a model

For Luce Irigaray, it is not only the Buddha who offers us a model, we can also learn from the flower itself. She wants to distinguish between observing or contemplating a living thing or a manufactured object. It is important to recall that what the Buddha 'is gazing at is not just anything – it is a flower' (LTY, 24-25), which according to her, 'perhaps offers us the best object for meditation upon the appropriateness of form to matter' (LTY, 24-25). The flower is a form which is appropriate to contemplate because it is one of the simplest, which is a living-thing (and we might add, because it is overtly sexual). According to Luce Irigaray, the flower also resembles our own being: our gaze is the flowering of our own body (they are the windows to our soul? Or we might say the flower of our spirit) where we are open to the world around us as a living

(male or female) being. We cultivate our senses as our opening to the world; the flower too is a cultivated nature which opens to the world. The gaze of the flower and the gaze of the Buddha meet in an openness of nature-spirit. It is for this reason that not only the Buddha's gaze on the flower offers us a new model through which we can see the living-world but the flower too:

> ‘Between us we can train ourselves to be both contemplative regard and the beauty appropriate to our matter, the spiritual and carnal fulfilment of the forms of our body. Pursuing this simultaneously natural and spiritual meditation of a great Eastern sage, I'd say that a flower usually has a pleasant scent. It sways with the wind, without rigidity. It also evolves within itself; it grows, blossoms, grows back. Some of them, those I find most engaging, open with the rising sun and close up with the evening. There are flowers for every season. The most hardy of them, those least cultivated by man, come forth while preserving their roots; they are constantly moving between the appearance of their forms and the earth's resources. They survive bad weathers and winters. There are the ones, perhaps, that might best serve us as a spiritual model’ (ILTY, 25)

In short, we can cultivate ourselves, remaining in the body, and learning from the simple living-world around us by looking in a different way and appreciating the aliveness of a thing. The flower as a living-thing offers us a model for our cultivation. For her then, the Buddha's renunciation of objects

does not mean he renounced life (BEW, 36). In fact, he returned to it. We can see then that it is not only the Buddha who serves as a guide for our spiritual cultivation but the flower too. The Buddha gazing at the flower (can we also say the flower gazing at the Buddha?) offers us a unified *but still differentiated living model* which guides us towards our own cultivation. As she says: 'the Buddha's gazing at a flower might provide us with a model. So might the flower' (LTY, 25).

Contemplation, such as the gazing upon a flower, offers us a model which cultivates our nature-spirit alongside and with a living-thing, which we might even say is cultivating its own nature-spirit. If we look at a flower in this way, then both ourselves and the living-thing are preserved as a living-subject and a living-thing: I-he (or I-she) and the living-thing are and remain transcendent to each other. Neither the flower, for example, nor ourselves, are reduced to an object for the other. For Luce Irigaray, to contemplate a living thing is to contemplate life. Life, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the invisible energy which pervades the vegetal, animal and (male or female) human realms.

The perception and cultivation of the invisible is very important for Luce Irigaray's thought.[80] Here my reading focuses on the East-West dimension of invisible "energy". In order to respect sexuate difference it is important to

[80] Her reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's visible/invisible, has been heavily criticised (Lehtinen, 2014, 43-44).

understand that it does not 'correspond to the respect of something visible, but of something invisible which results from a relation with oneself, with the other, with the world peculiar to each gender' (BT, 147). Here we see again this threefold relationality of self, other and gender, and we see again a movement away from the realm of vision as a predominant mode of perception. Luce Irigaray draws our attention to the fact that 'in Western philosophy the thought of the world as a living world no longer exists,' nor she states, 'does the thought of sexuate difference' (BEW, 45). 'Life is above all always individual, personal,' but it is also 'always sexed' it is two (LTY, 54). For her, a culture which fails or refuses to see the reality of a sexuately different other, also fails to perceive life as the invisible energy which permeates living-subjects and living-things. This cultivation of a living relationship generates this invisible living energy between us. By looking at a flower, our relation to the vegetal is cultivated, and we are brought to our own natural or living rhythm as a human being (Marder, 2014, 227). Through this perception, we differentiate between living and non-living things; and, being able to perceive another thing as living (such as a plant, a tree, an animal) further opens up the possibility to see ourselves (male or female) also as a living-subject. This in turn means we are able to see another human being (male or female) as a living-subject, and it ensures we do not fall into the mistake of seeing them as mere objects. Finally, we might come to see the other as sexuately differentiated to us, by a living-difference.

5.4. Overcoming nature and spirit in Luce Irigaray

When Luce Irigaray discusses the Buddha looking at the flower she is, as already mendtioned, engaging with the thought of Hegel. For her, looking at a living thing such as a flower is a natural-spiritual method which transcends the distinction between nature and spirit set up by Hegel (Marder, 2014, 214). The need to overcome the split of spirit and nature found in Hegel's philosophy is paramount for her because a woman is condemned to nature and reproduction, while only a man becomes free in the realms of history, culture and politics, i.e., the higher realms of spirit which transcend nature and the family in the individual subject. According to her interpretation of Hegel, to achieve individuation as a subject is to transcend the family life and enter the public realm (ILTY; BSW; EIC). To remain in the family realm is to fail to attain to being an autonomous subject, and most importantly, this is only open to the father of the household. A woman is not capable of becoming a subject because she finds her place in the family as a mother; she is in fact limited to reproduction, and therefore, caught up in the objective world of nature, unable to ascend to the higher levels of spirit such as politics and culture (religion, art and philosophy.) Hegel is not the only philosopher guilty of setting up this division between nature and spirit. It is a common trend within the history of Western philosophy and Christian thought (Lloyd, 1993). Hegel is often seen as the apex of the Western tradition which unites Christianity and philosophy, so it could be for this reason that Luce Irigaray often focuses on Hegel. However, we cannot equate overcoming Hegel with overcoming the fundamental problems of Western philosophy. For her, Hegel appears to represent Western philosophy as such. (Deutscher, 2003, 149).

What is most interesting for us here is that Luce Irigaray is unique in her claim that the image of the Buddha looking at a flower is an exemplary model of a perceptual-spritual method which can overcome the dichotomies of Western thought. For her:

> 'What is remarkable in these traditions is the fact that thought is ready to listen to nature, to the sensible. The famous example of this is the Buddha contemplating a flower. For him, this gesture probably represents the perfect act since it respects nature while becoming spiritual. The overcoming of matter by spirit – the privileging of the speculative over the sensible is, therefore, no more. Buddha becomes spirit while remaining sensible, awakened flesh. Surely this is a fine lesson in love?' (ILTY, 139-140)

In fact, her interpretation of the Buddha, brings this way of thinking in to relation with Western philosophy in a very similar way to Nishitani Keiji, with the aim of overcoming the dichotomies of Western thought. For Luce Irigaray, through the cultivation of our perception of the vegetal, we become capable of overcoming the generally accepted division set up between the spiritual and the natural in Western philosophy (Marder, 2014, 214). This division plays out most prominently in the split between consciousness and matter, or mind and body, which is essentially a dualistic model of understanding ourselves. We saw this also in Nishitani Keiji's thought – the split between self-consciousness and the external world is a dualism which causes alienation and nihilism.

By cultivating our perception of a living thing, as opposed to perceiving all things as mere objects (confusing living, non-living and/or constructed things) we simultaneously transform the thing we are looking at and ourselves. It is the Buddha that provides this model for a natural-spiritual practice:

> 'perception can be trained as a spiritual method. As such it becomes a means for respecting what exists, for contemplating it and achieving an ecstasy/in-stasy in relationship with the perceived. This can take place in the contemplation of nature: I am thinking about the gaze of Buddha towards the flower' (TBT, 50)

According to her what we can learn most from the Buddha is to remain sensible in our transcendence, and to find spirit-in-nature (or we might just as easily say nature-in-spirit). Spirit is no longer transcendent and therefore separate to nature as usually found in the Christian and Western philosophical tradition from Plato to Hegel. This means that we no longer aim to go outside of (or transcend) the world in order to realise the good, divinity, God or whatever the transcendent goal might have been. We do not aim to achieve an ek-stasis; rather, we aim to achieve an en-stasis: a realization of spirit in, and without leaving, the sensible (Lorraine, 1999;ADD REF). As we saw in the previous chapter, for her, and we might say for Nishitani Keiji too, Eastern traditions provide resources for precisely these kinds of practices which allow

us to remain in the body or the sensible corporeal while becoming divine and establishing a harmonious relationship to our body and the natural world as a living-world of which we are a part. The key point here is that:

> 'Buddha, for whom re-awakening takes place beginning from the contemplation of the most simple, of the most everyday, of the least extraordinary and violent: the contemplation of a flower ... The perfection of the act is achieved through a cultivation of the senses ... contemplation occurs in the encounter between two cultivated natures: between a flower as a production of the earth's beauty and the gaze of Buddha as the place where its body flowers, both of which are open thanks to the light of the sun, micro- and macrocosmic' (TBT, 72-73)

We can see here that for Luce Irigaray the Buddha returns to the simplest of everyday activities – the main tenet of Zen Buddhism too. We should note a sense of harmony or re-establishing of the relationship between macrocosmic and microcosmic which she highlights here. According to Luce Irigaray, a spiritual realisation in the sensible is a mediation which does not fit with the preference of the masculine subject's need for transcendence (in the traditional sense of going out of oneself, or out of the world to another world.) It is a new model for seeing things in the world; a sort of transcendence-in-immanence or *vice versa*, what she calls a sensible-transcendent, and what I, following Nishitani Keiji (in translation) call transdescendence. As Tamsin Lorrain explains:

> ‘The person who can experience life in its “authentic reality” is the person who is open to a sensible transcendental. This person is the lover of life who refuses to entomb herself in a sterile body and who instead encourages ceaseless transmutation of a self and world in living contact’ (1999, 70)

In Luce Irigaray’s model, a man does not need to go out of himself to enter the spirit, as he did to construct his subjectivity through objects. Instead, he remains in touch with his body, his nature and his natural rhythm, which brings him to a sensible transcendental experience between the micro and macro cosmic. If this perceptual-spiritual practice is successful, then inevitably woman will be dislodged from her confusion with the world of reproduction/nature as found in Hegel's thought. This is because a man will no longer go out of himself into the realm of transcendence or spirit, and he will no longer leave behind nature for higher consciousness. He will not need to cut off nature, to establish consciousness. He will instead cultivate transcendence while remaining linked to life. A woman will not be left behind in the family, in the lower level of consciousness, which is still in fact on the level of mere nature as an object. A man will also be rooted there in nature as a male living-subject. A woman too then is conceivably capable of being a subject while remaining in nature; instead of being left behind there and subjugated to her reproductive function as a part of objective nature, she becomes capable of subjectivity in the objectivity of her gender. In short, she is recognised as another subject. This is

in fact, I think, the main thrust behind Luce Irigaray's Buddhism.

Much like we saw earlier with Nishitani Keiji, for Luce Irigaray, the use of the Buddha image is in fact subversive of the Western masculine self-consciousness. Interestingly, in his history of philosophy, Hegel locates the beginning of subjectivity as individuality with Buddhism (Park, 2010). For Hegel however, this individuality is not complete, precisely because it does not leave the natural realm. If Luce Irigaray is aware of this, then it provides another reason for her use of the Buddha image, as a model for overcoming what she sees as a misunderstanding made by Hegel. Sokthan Yeng, is to my knowledge one of the few scholars who has picked up on this (2014, 65-66).

When asked where she took this image of the Buddha gazing at a flower from, Luce Irigaray's response was: 'probably I read something about that, but I cannot give you the exact reference. I can say that I experienced it during a summer' (CON, 43). We see then that it is an appeal to her own contemplative experience which she draws on to explain this image of the Buddha and the flower, not a traditional textual source. In fact, to my knowledge there is no such traditional textual source. There are numerous Buddhist texts where the presence of flowers is unmissable. These are found especially the later Mahāyāna texts; as examples, we can cite the Lotus sutra (named after a flower), the Nirvana sutra and the Vimalakirti sutra. These three texts contain references to various types of flowers and are used in abundance; as offerings with symbolic meanings, and as metaphors within teachings given by the

Buddha, a Bodhisattva, a God or Goddess, or one of the Buddha's disciples. But within these texts we find no reference to the Buddha gazing or contemplating a flower.

There is however, one mythical text which I think corresponds the closest to Luce Irigaray's image. This is the flower sermon of the Ch'an/Zen Buddhist traditions. The Flower sermon is the only example to my knowledge where the Buddha raises a flower.

The Flower Sermon is the legendary/mythical origin of Zen (C. *Cha'n*) Buddhism. It is also case six of the *mumonkan* (C. *wu-men kuan*) a thirteenth century *kōan (C. gōng'àn) collection* known as 'The Buddha holds out a flower'. The story goes that when 'Śākyamuni Buddha was at Mount Grdhrakhuta, he held out a flower to his listeners. Everyone was silent. Only Mahākāśyapa broke into a broad smile. The Buddha said, "I have the True Dharma Eye, the Marvellous Mind of Nirvana, the True Form of the Formless, and the Subtle Dharma Gate, independent of words and transmitted beyond doctrine. This I have entrusted to Mahakashyapa' (Sekida, 2005, 41).[81] However, the key difference here is that the flower appears to be cut from nature, as far as we know, and it is for another to observe, and not the Buddha himself who looks at it. It is traditionally seen as the passing on of the fundamental non-dual insight of Zen. We cannot assume that Luce Irigaray knows of this text or whether this

[81] See also, Welter, 2000.

is the text she read and forgot. If this is where she takes the imagery from, and I very much doubt it, she has given it a new non-traditional meaning in her own weaving between traditions.

I think it is safe to say that there is no gazing at a flower as a practice as such found in Buddhist texts. There are several texts where the presence of flowers is unmissable, but there are no texts where the image of the Buddha looking at a flower is presented as an actual teaching. And, moreover, that the teaching presented is anything like the one Luce Irigaray suggest in her own text.[82] We must conclude that her Buddha gazing at the flower is an image of her own making; an imaginary teaching that serves the purposes for the realisation of her own thought, especially in relation to nature and the vegetal. It is strange that not a single commentator has picked up on this most significant point. I am almost certain that the image Luce Irigaray is using, is inspired by Jiddu Krishnamurti and one of his many examples of looking at flowers.[83] After all, he was, for her, 'the Buddha of our time' (BEW, 47). The key point for our discussion below is that the flower was clearly cut from nature, and not viewed in nature as Luce Irigaray contemplates. This distinction makes a clear difference between seeing a flower in nature, and seeing a flower cut from nature, and it suggests, that Luce Irigaray is reifying life, in the eyes of Nishitani Keiji as we shall see.

[82] Michael Marder, following Luce Irigaray, speculates on the kind of flower (water lily) the Buddha is looking at in his *The philosopher's plant (2014),* but this is a speculation on a speculation and has no substance at all.
[83] This is outside the realm of what I am trying to do in this thesis. Nevertheless, please see the final transcript of *On Education (1974)* as one example of many found in the talks of J. Krishnamurti.

5.5. Nishitani Keiji's re-interpretation of Ikebana

In the previous chapter we saw how Nishitani Keiji's Zazen practice is fundamental to understanding his standpoint of *śūnyatā*. Here we shall focus on the aesthetic, understood as both the classical Greek understanding of sensory and perceptual experience, as well as the modern interpretation as relating to an art form. We shall do so through Nishitani Keiji's article on Japanese Ikebana – the art of flower arranging.

Nishitani Keiji often uses the example of looking at a flower in his writings to demonstrate or clarify his ideas. Unlike Luce Irigaray he does not do so with reference to the Buddha. But, we should note that the Buddha raising a flower in front of his congregation, and Mahakyshapa, one of his senior disciples smiling at this act, is the mythical act which marks the beginning of Zen Buddhism. So there is a hidden or deeper cultural reference potentially taking place here between Nishitani Keiji's discussion of a flower, the insight through seeing this flower, and the broader Zen Buddhist traditions.

In his writings, Nishitani Keiji refers to looking at a flower several times, in order to show several different aspects of his thought. For instance, in *Religion and Nothingness (1990)* he discusses the flower in relation to nihility

(RN, 101). In his essay *Religious-philosophical existence (1990)* he makes direct reference to seeing the flower in emptiness, and in his *The significance of Zen in modern society (1975)* Nishitani Keiji uses the example of looking at a flower and absorption once more: 'looking at a flower, he throws his whole being into that flower' he risks his whole self in a total absorption resulting in a new being or new self-awareness, as non-dual. And finally, in his *The Japanese Art of Arranged Flowers ([1975] 1995)* he discusses the Japanese art of Ikebana, where the practitioner of Ikebana creates an "open space" of emptiness (*śūnyatā)* through the arrangement of the flowers. Creating a space where we can see the flowers in *śūnyatā* demonstrating that the practitioner creates the space from a place of non-attachment and non-duality, while bringing this insight to life for the viewer, so that they too may sense this place or space of non-attachment and non-duality through the act of seeing. Creating this space through Ikebana makes it possible for another to see in emptiness or recognise this emptiness. This is his most comprehensive example of the flower and *śūnyatā* in practice, therefore, we shall focus on it here. It should be noted however, that in all these examples we see a perceptual-sensory-bodily experience combined with an aesthetic shift in self-understanding. They are examples of, or even better evocations of, a person becoming one's true self or realizing one's self in an encounter between a subject and a natural thing; where in the encounter itself this dichotomy is overcome through a unifying and direct realization of one's self, which takes place through the act of presenting and/or viewing the flower i.e., a transcendent-sensible or transdecendent experience.

In *The Japanese Art of Arranged Flowers (1995)* Nishitani Keiji

discusses the cutting of flowers and their arrangement in a vase.[84] Through his poetic analysis of Ikebana, he shows us the double exposure encapsulated in this fundamental thought of *śūnyatā*. Even though it is about a classic art of Japanese culture there is no doubt that such an art, for Nishitani Keiji, embodies the Zen Buddhist way. And each of his poetic descriptions of the cutting, preparing and displaying of the flower in emptiness resonate with the Buddhist path in general and his teaching of *śūnyatā,* as we can see, if we jump a little ahead in our own analysis:

> 'The flowers are simply there, in their correctness. While sending forth a faint coolness from within a fathomless composure – like a person who has eradicated all attachments to life and abandoned all the expectations fundamental to our mundane existence – through complete silence they communicate that which is eternal' (CF, 26)

Firstly, let us consider the double exposure. In a personal anecdote of Nishitani Keiji's, he weaves together the poetry of Basho, the gospel of Mark, T.S. Eliot and a saying of one of the Zen patriarchs. He is walking along the Ginza, and what he calls a double exposure of a life-death/death-life perspective emerges as an insight into the human predicament:

[84] We should note here that this article is a response to an essay written by Jean Paul Sartre on Ikebana; an essay which Nishitani Keiji considers to be deeply flawed.

> ‘There is no need for the actual buildings to crumble and go to seed. One can see the Ginza, for instance, just as it is, in all its magnificence as a field of Pampas grass.[85] One can look at it as if it were a double exposure – which is, after all, its real portrait. For in truth, reality itself is two-layered. A hundred years hence, not one of the people now walking on the Ginza will be alive, neither the young nor the old, the men nor the women. As the old saying goes, “With a single thought, ten thousand years. And with ten thousand years, a single thought.” In a flash of lightning before the mind’s eye, what is to be actual a hundred years hence, is already an actuality today. We can look at the living as they walk full of health down the Ginza and see, in double exposure, a picture of the dead. Basho’s lines are about the Ginza’ (RN, 51)

This image is one where nihility (death) and self-consciousness (life) are unified and seen as a double exposure – each one being necessary for the other, and in no way being hierarchically related, but rather deeply entwined together in an inseparable manner; without self-consciousness we cannot know time or death, and without nihility, there would be no time or self-conscious life. These are two sides of the totality of reality, the third side being the standpoint of double exposure: seeing them both simultaneously, i.e., *śūnyatā*. Let's look at this with respect to the flowers in Nishitani Keiji's art of Ikebana.

[85] Here he is referring to Basho’s Haiku:“Lightning flashes-Close by my face. The pampas grass” (RN, 51)

Firstly, Nishitani Keiji clearly differentiates between the flower growing in the field and the flower which has been cut for the art of Ikebana. For him, this difference is one between nature or life and emptiness. It is also the difference between two kinds of art:

> 'One is an art directly in life, and the other is an art alive in death … One kind of art seeks eternity by denying temporality, and the other tries to unveil eternity by being thoroughly temporal. The former arises out of the natural will or desire of life, and the latter arises out of emptiness which has severed that natural will or desire' (CF, 26)

For him, a flower growing naturally is trying to deny time. All things in nature, including people, try to deny time through their growth and their striving (and their will in the case of people.) Trees or grass or flowers all resist the pull within themselves that is working towards their own cessation. Instead they strive upwards to the sunlight, the rain and the wind, to receive the nutrients they require to live. They struggle against gravity growing out of the earth and continually going beyond themselves, all in an attempt (unconscious admittedly) to deny the pull of death. This underlying death, or put another way nihility, separates me from the flower. We are all cast over a nihility. To quote from elsewhere:

> ‘Take the tiny flower blooming away out in my garden. It grew from a single seed and will one day return to the earth, never again to return so long as this world exists. Yet we do not know where its pretty little face appeared from nor where it will disappear to. Behind it lies absolute nihility: the same nihility that lies behind us, the same nihility that lies in the space between flowers and me. Separated from me by the abyss of that nihility, the flower in my garden is an unknown entity’ (RN, 101)

The essential difference then between a flower in nature and the flower in Ikebana is that this striving has been cut off. The cutting of the flower takes it out of this life struggle and the cutting itself is the mark of the difference between Ikebana and other arts.[86] As Nishitani Keiji states Ikebana is different. From the position of the practitioner, the art reflects the mind of the artist. Therefore, like breathing in Zazen, there is no denial of time; likewise in Ikebana, in the midst of time we move along ‘without the slightest gap’ (CF, 24). Ikebana, therefore, is the cutting act which demarcates life (with its resistance to nihility) and *śūnyatā* (the transdescendence of this dichotomy):

> ‘the severing of this very life of nature. Flowers in the field or garden pollinate in order to procreate. *[They are attempting to deny*

[86] It should be noted that *Kiru* “to cut” is an important aesthetic concept in Japanese thought. It is found in Ikebana, swordmanship and even film. See, Parkes’ *Japanese aesthetics (2017)* and Ritchie’s *A Tractate on Japanese aesthetics* (2007)

time.] This is part of the natural will or desire of life. The arranged flower has had this will or desire cut off. It is rather in the world of death, poised in death. It has become severed from the life which denies time, and has itself entered time and become momentary' (CF, 25)

In other words, its nihility has become apparent and yet it is not the mere nihility of seeing the flower, against myself over there in the field, nor is it seeing a withering flower which is dying a mere natural death. The flower cut in the manner of Ikebana is removed from its life struggle, and its nihility is now revealed in its emptiness. In his own words Nishitani Keiji sets up the juxtaposition for us:

'While the life of nature has temporality as part of its essence, it goes against and conceals that essence. Nature exists as if it were trying to slip away from time. On the other hand, the flower with its roots cut off has, in one stroke, returned to its original, essential fate in time. This is not the life of a flower in nature. The flower cannot do this by itself. It is merely man's caprice to force the flower against its natural will or desire. The flower is thus made to stand poised in its hidden essence, to reveal that essence' (CF, 25)

We should recognise here that the translation again of *Ningen* is "man", or human beings. It should also be noted that this is "man's caprice"; it

is an art whereby a man or woman take a flower from its natural state and make with it something for their own gratification, or, as we see in Nishitani Keiji's thought, they demonstrate a way of being such as *śūnyatā*. The concealed essence of temporality is brought out for us to see, and therefore, to see in ourselves: our life is revealed to us in seeing the flower. What is required is this double exposure which is captured by the cutting off of life and of time. I quote at length:

> 'From the perspective of their fundamental nature, all things in the world are rootless blades of grass. Such grass, however, having put roots down into the ground, itself hides its fundamental rootlessness. *[This was also the perspective of ordinary or everyday life that we saw in chapter four; that things and people appear to have roots, that we go about in an unexamined manner, in short, in the illusion of self-conscious subsistence.]* Through having been cut from their roots, they are, for the first time, made to thoroughly manifest their fundamental nature – their rootlessness. *[In the case of the flower, the cutting; in the case of things, their perishing; in the case of man, the doubting of his or her self-existent self or to face death.]* To be shifted from the world of life into the world of death is, for the flower, a kind of transcendence. The flower made to stand upon death has been cut off from the constructs of time that occur in life, and it is just as though it stands in the timeless present; its evanescent existence of several days becomes a momentary point in which there is no arising or perishing. The flower is shifted to this transcendent moment and fixed there. It becomes a temporary

manifestation of eternity that has emerged in time' (CF, 25)[87]

Although gradually more abstract, this excerpt clarifies the relation between life, death, time and transcendence. The essence of the flower is fundamentally altered by it being removed from its natural situation. This removal brings its essence onto the field of death, but, for a moment, it is still living; albeit cast over this death. It is now shown to be rootless, whereas before it hid this rootlessness in its desire and striving for life. In its cut placement, it is now transcendent, still of this world, still alive, but with its underlying nihility or death now revealed. The flower stands for several days poised in this life-death position. This is transcendence as the double exposure of life and death, death and life. It is the same as the inhalation and exhalation of zazen, and it is the demonstration of *śūnyatā*. Let us see how this manifests within the art itself:

> 'Probably the person who arranges the flowers senses these things, either consciously or unconsciously – for example, when he or she places them in the *tokonoma [a built in space such as an alcove or recess where art works are usually displayed]* and gives them the space they are to dominate. Within that space, the flowers exist with solemnity, floating in emptiness, just as though they have emerged from nothingness. The space about them, the space of the entire room, is drawn taut by the existence of the flowers, just as if it had received a

[87] My emphasis

charge of electricity, and the air takes on a tension and gravity. The flowers, through the certainty with which they occupy the space, sweep clear the atmosphere. The flowers themselves, however, have no awareness or intention of doing this. The sweeping clear of the air about them is the response of the space of nothingness' (CF, 25-26)[88]

And here in the text the earlier quotation is repeated, that the flowers are simply there, that they give a coolness, that the artist was unattached, that this all sits together in a silent space of emptiness (CF, 26). Nishitani Keiji's evocative analysis of Ikebana shows us both his sensibility to life and death, and the role that art plays between them. Moreover, it demonstrates for us this double exposure in relation to an artist, to zazen, to certainty and doubt, and even to time. In fact, the fundamental point in this essay is time, however, our focus is not time as such but rather *śūnyatā*:

'the essence of the plant being turned into art lies in the aforementioned activity of cutting the plant. With this activity, the emptiness … which lies hidden in the depths of the plant is unveiled' (CF, 26)

Śūnyatā (emptiness) takes place owing to the double exposure of both

[88] My italics

life and death in the cutting of the flower and its presentation. Poised in the *tokonoma* for several days, the flowers draw tight the atmosphere, and people sense *śūnyatā*. This is made possible through the artist's disposition (i.e., a non-self or pure subject acting in emptiness) and the flower's presentation of life and death unveils *śūnyatā*. That is, it reveals our inherent nature as non-self.

5.6. Concluding remarks on flower viewing

Juxtaposing this to what we have seen with Nishitani Keiji's version of flower viewing, we can see some a significant difference in perspective. For him, what is most important to see life and nihility simultaneously, is the cutting of the flower and its removal from the natural state in which we find it. This is because the flower in its natural state conceals its nihility through its striving and growth. We can assume therefore, that viewing a flower in its natural environment for him, does not offer us a viable contemplation of life. A cut flower, placed in the *tokonoma*, offers us something which is for him clearly more significant but, which does not disregard the dimension of life. On the contrary, we are able to see life in its true rootlessness by removing it from its position in mere nature and bringing out its hidden nihility or struggle against death. The flower, now poised for our viewing, gives us this double exposure of life-death, death-life, from which we can "sense" *śūnyatā* in the atmosphere. It is art, made by a non-self, making visible life/death.

Unless we reveal the flower in its essence as *śūnyatā* by bringing it out to be seen in both of its dimensions simultaneously, we fall into an essentialism of the life dimension – by establishing a sort of reified thing on the field of consciousness. Recall above, the key quote where viewing a flower in nature:

> 'we do not know where its pretty little face appeared from nor where it will disappear to. Behind it lies absolute nihility: the same nihility that lies behind us, the same nihility that lies in the space between flowers and me. Separated from me by the abyss of that nihility, the flower in my garden is an unknown entity' (RN, 101)

In short, without a double exposure of life and death we risk falling into a false way of viewing anything (whether a flower, a Buddha, or ourselves). If we attempt to see these things without the insight of *śūnyatā* then we remain separated over an abyss of nihility, and we fail to see ourselves as we truly are.

However, from Luce Irigaray's perspective, we cannot see the vegetal and life if we do not acknowledge sexuate difference. For example, was it a man or a woman who cut and placed the flowers in the *tokonoma*? Was this person a pure male or pure female subject? These questions must be asked if we are to take into consideration sexuate difference, and to see life as it is always sexed. Therefore, the failure to acknowledge the sexuate nature of the artist, and the sexuate nature of the flower, while nevertheless cutting it and placing it for

anyone to see, is to over emphasise death or nihility in Luce Irigaray's eyes and risks the likelihood of furthering a nihilistic self-understanding.

Expanding on this then, and in order to find a balance between Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray, my own position, would be that the fact of birth must be balanced with the fact of death, and the fact of death must be balanced with the fact of birth. Luce Irigaray presents a position strongly based on birth, which in many ways is an attempt to balance the prejudice of what she considers to be the masculine Western philosophical tradition's focus on death (something we could criticise Nishitani Keiji for too). By recognising the fact of birth and thinking it through as Luce Irigaray demands us to, and if we slightly modify Nishitani Keiji's position to acknowledge that everyone who is alive is suspended between birth and death (rather than life and death) then I think we start to see a more balanced position established dynamically between them – without birth there is no death, and without seeing both in every living moment, we fail to see life at all, and therefore, we fail to see the sexuate nature of life.

Life is always born, sexuately different, and always suspended over death which can come at any moment. The flower is overtly sexual, the man or woman who looks at the flower and/or cuts the flower is also sexuate. In many ways, we must both see the flower in nature and contemplate it, and then cut it and place it in a space appropriate to it, so that I and the other can both see the flower suspended in its true essence – neither natural or cultural but empty of any such dualism i.e., *śūnyatā*. By viewing the flower a non-he and a non-she

can become visible too; through their relation to birth-death, and life. This is *śūnyatā* which includes the sexuate nature of life, and which is made available in this case, through nature brought into conjunction with art.

5.7. Luce Irigaray and the problem of non-duality

The most significant problem I must address in Luce Irigaray's Buddhism, which is perhaps more relevant to her interpretation of Yoga, and crucial for my understanding of non-he and non-she, is that of non-duality. The problem is that Luce Irigaray has issues with the idea of non-duality as a oneness which we are all reduced to.

The issue of non-duality as it pertains to the ethical self has been raised by Erin McCarthy (2014), who conceives of Luce Irigaray's understanding of intersubjective relations as a form of non-duality. This is the basis of her comparison with the thought of Watsuji Tetsuro, whose understanding of intersubjective relations as *ningen*, is also considered to be based on a non-dual conception of self-other relations. This non-duality and its relation to Buddhism, Tantra and sexuality has also been looked at by Sokthan Yeng (2013; 2014). Here Sokhtan Yeng focuses mostly on Buddhism and Buddhist Tantra, and not Yoga as such. In this section, the subject as non-dual because it is fundamentally intersubjective is not the primary issue. Non-duality here is concerned with the division between an inner and an outer world, such as we

might find in a self-understanding with a subject-object or a mind-body dichotomy. The clearest example of such a dichotomy found in the Western philosophical tradition is that of Descartes, where the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans* are two distinct and separate substances which along with God make up "reality". There are other ways of conceptualising the inner and the outer, or the mind and the body (as we have already touched upon) but here, in general, the issue is the separation that can occur between a subject and the outer world, and that this is often conceived of in terms of a subject, over and against a world of objects, as we saw in chapter three. As we have seen, a non-dual experience, is one where such divisions fall away, usually resulting in, or from, a direct experience of some unifying reality or oneness. For Nishitani Keiji, this was best captured by reality realising itself (RN, 5) and his breakthrough to nihility, and then to the non-self understood on the field of *śūnyatā*. As far as we can tell, this appears to be precisely the kind of non-dual experience Luce Irigaray has issues with.

Luce Irigaray's understanding of Yoga and non-duality, appears to be drawn from her reading of *Patañjali*.[89] There are several references to him in her texts, here we see one in relation to looking at things:

> 'the question of looking at and contemplating is also present in

[89] *Patañjali* is estimated to have been alive around 200 C.E. He compiled a well-known treatise on Yoga, with its famous opening which defines yoga as the stilling of the 'whirls of consciousness' (Feuerstein, 1998, 4).

The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali. But Patañjali often speaks about objects, material or mental, and about the necessity of overcoming the subject-object duality' (CN, 43)

Luce Irigaray interprets the Buddha and Buddhism as a return to nature, by considering the perception of the invisible living energy between us and living-things, and this is, for her, more important than overcoming the subject-object division (CN, 41). For her, it is enough if we can reach a state close to the non-duality of *Patañjali* while remaining linked with life:

'The flower as such is not absolutely necessary for me to remain in myself. But it can help me because it is autonomous with respect to me, and it is also a living being. Thus I can concentrate and contemplate looking at a flower. And I can reach in this way a state of energy close to that described by *Patañjali* without for all that having to remove the flower as such' (CN, 43)

Luce Irigaray, as we saw, wants to achieve her sensible-transcendental insight into life, through nature, while never leaving it. She does not want to enter a non-dual state, but she does want to come close to it. What is clear is that Luce Irigaray does want the subject and object relationship to be a fluid one, meaning that the two intertwine to varying degrees, and as we saw in the previous chapter, she reconceptualises our existence as rhythmical and in-tune

with nature as a blend of rhythms to underpin this fluidity. The Buddha, as we saw, was also in a fluid relation to the natural world as a pure subject. Therefore, she does not want a non-dual (oneness) which is reached outside of one's self or one which negates the body and the sensible. She wants to use the example of the contemplation of the flower to show the kind of state she prefers us to reach, and one which will also preserve sexuate difference thereby establishing difference between men and women. In her example of the Buddha, the Buddha maintains this macro-micro relationship, whereas, for her, Yoga is spoken of as a union.

In short, overcoming the subject-object dichotomy is not acceptable for Luce Irigaray, because sexuate difference is an irreducible difference which depends on the objectivity of gender. For her, as we saw in the introduction, the fluid interplay of subjectivity and objectivity must be maintained for her fundamental thought of sexuate difference to remain irreducible. To reduce the dimensions of our subjectivity (our horizontal transcendence) and our objectivity (gender) to the same, i.e., oneness, is to reduce what she wants to posit as a primary and irreducible difference, i.e., sexuate difference, also to a oneness. This reduction of everything to the same, is for her, nihilistic. I think that in Luce Irigaray's thought, her fear is that a non-dual experience is fundamentally one which negates our body, which she must maintain if we are to allow for sexuation, sexuate belonging and sexuate difference, through the objectivity of our gender to blossom.

We cannot go into detail here, but it is important to note that Luce Irigaray is once again making sweeping statements concerning Yoga and Buddhism. Specifically, to *Patañjali* as Feuerstein rightly points out, in classical yoga is understood to have a very firm duality of consciousness and manifestation, 'classical Yoga avows a strict dualism between Spirit (*purusha*) and cosmos (*prakriti*)' (1998, 4). In fact, *Patañjali* is the right branch of Yoga to support Luce Irigaray's thought, at least in the sense of a clear duality being maintained – although this may still cause problems for sexuate difference. Also, we can note that there is a lot of cross-over between *Patañjali* and Buddhism (Feuerstein, 2008, 213-214). However, in Luce Irigaray's interpretation they are seemingly different, something which not much of the scholarship picks up on and confuses. This is another one of the repercussions of her own homogenisation and interpretation of Eastern traditions, which is not clearly examined in the scholarship. Her work we must remember is inspirational at best, and her use of Eastern practices is the focus, not her reading of its philosophy.

We should note that Luce Irigaray does not deny non-duality as a possibility. She simply wants to allow for difference to be maintained, so she can ground the universality of sexuate difference in fluid relations between living subjects and objects. For her the universal is two: male and female; and oneness, could erase this. She does not want a transcendence outside of the world, she always wants to establish a two-ness, with both man and woman having their own appropriate mediations for their own bodies and sense of self (I-he/I-she) and the cultural worlds they construct: masculine and feminine

cultures. For man, as we have seen this takes place through the mediation of an object. It is therefore unsurprising that his transcendence is either outside of himself (like an object) and the world (beyond all objects), or, as Luce Irigaray claims in the case of *Patañjali* a realization of oneness in non-duality. All of which surmount the subject-object division in a manner which suits the masculine subject's needs.

Now we get to the crux of Luce Irigaray position, this need to overcome duality is a masculine need, 'from a masculine point of view it is fitting to surmount this duality, because it generally corresponds to an inability of the subject to stay in the self' (CN, 43). This refers to the male subject's need to go out of himself in order to become that very male subject he is. He does not remain in the sensible, in his gendered body, and in relation to his birth; instead he seeks outside of himself, to break with his mother in his construction as a subject. It seems here that Luce Irigaray suggests that overcoming the subject-object dichotomy is an appropriate mediation for a man because he already prejudices this relationship to objects, and the outside of himself, in the constitution of himself as a subject. By overcoming the division between himself and objects he returns to himself. According to Luce Irigaray, it may be that such a mediation is appropriate from a masculine perspective, but not from the perspective of a woman, which privileges the intersubjective dimension in the construction of a female subject. Yoga as a union between the inner and the outer, or some mode of overcoming the subject/object division, may therefore, not be suitable for a woman at all, and nor therefore, would the practices of Yoga, nor perhaps other Eastern practices such as zazen.

Therefore, Luce Irigaray's idea of a pure subject (such as we saw with the Buddha) must remain dual for her fundamental thought of sexuate difference to be maintained as a play between subjective transcendence and objective gender. This we must envision as resulting in two possibilities as a pure subject, male or female, and their two respective cultural worlds: masculine or feminine. A pure subject, whether a man or a woman, must reach an 'en-stasis in oneself while intensely living' (CN 43). For her, as we shall see below, this permits both an easier passage to daily existence and to relations with other living beings. As we saw in the previous chapter, in zazen, it is precisely such an en-stasis which was also being advocated by Nishitani Keiji in his realization of *śūnyatā:* a realization which never leaves this world and returns transfigured but immediately in the everydayness of life. The only question would be, how does this work in relation to living things, and to another who is different, i.e., a woman? And can we work towards an understanding of non-self as non-he and non-she?

5.8. Nishitani Keiji, flowers in non-duality

Nishitani Keiji's understanding of the self at its most fundamental level is what we have called no-self. The no-self, is a self that interpenetrates all things and which all things interpenetrate (Unno, 1989, 317). In *Religion and Nothingness*, the self in its interpenetrational relation to things is called *egoteki,*

a term coined by Nishitani Keiji.90 As we shall see, the key to this non-self is the same as Luce Irigaray's pure subject: it is a self which is non-attached, free from desire for objects, and it is a self which is deeply related to others and the world around him or her. It is not therefore, a transcendent non-self lost in the non-differentiation of oneness.

The main point for us to grasp is that the no-self is in a relationship of reciprocal penetration with each and everything (Unno, 1989, 317), does not lose itself in a mass of non-differentiation or oneness, as Van Bragt (1990, 301) explains:

> 'Nishitani is careful to avoid associating "oneness" with any of the metaphysical overtones or logical obligations that it has in Western philosophy when he speaks of something "becoming one" with something else … It is the circuminsessional [i.e., interpenetrational] oneness that is intended here, a oneness that admits of opposites coming together in a [reciprocal] relationship'

90 Van Bragt does not consider the term have the same meaning as circuminsession, as found in the theological tradition where it stands for the reciprocal existence of the three persons of the trinity (1990, 195). Stambaugh however, in her excellent essay *The Formless Self (1999)* says that circum with its sense of moving around might be 'a bit misleading' and that 'in fact, circuminsessional and interpenetration almost seem to contradict each other' (1990, 150). I agree, and it is best to use the term interpenetrational-self than circuminsessional self.

The oneness of Western metaphysics leads is to nihility, not *śūnyatā*. A self which is on the field of consciousness, as we saw earlier, is separated from all things on an internal and external divide and comes to see itself as separate. A self on the field of nihility has broken free of such a divide but is now suspended over an abyss of nothingness. The self that realises itself as interpenetrational is a self which is fundamentally returned to itself in a new mode of being, as Unno (1989, 317) explains, the self which is in an unobstructed interpenetrational relationship with all things:

> 'does not mean a simple identification or oneness, the elimination of multiplicity. Rather, it affirms the real suchness of each independent and autonomous "in-itself" without negating multiple realities'

Another term Nishitani Keiji uses for this is 'the middle'. Each non-self and each thing exists most fully as themselves when they are realized as this interpenetrational reality: 'such a mode of being is the mode of being of things as they are in themselves, their non-objective, "middle" mode of being as the selfness that they are' (RN 150). Each thing and each non-self exists uniquely as itself, while at the same time each thing interpenetrates all other things and vice versa. We saw this in the last chapter, when Nishitani Keiji discussed the body and nature. The body is co-constitutive with nature and vice versa. This is why each and every one of us, is in fact absolute, and hence each one of us is in 'the middle'. We can see this expressed in the pithy Buddhist saying 'form is

emptiness, emptiness is form' a favourite of Nishitani Keiji's which he often resorts to, to express his position. As Unno (1989, 317) again explains for us succinctly:

> 'It is not the case that the two are simply merged or collapsed into one; rather, when emptiness is affirmed, form is negated; and when form is affirmed, emptiness is negated. When this simultaneous negation and affirmation occurs not only among two things, A and B, but among multiple realities, infinitely and boundlessly, we have what is called "non-obstructed interrelationship'

This is Nishitani Keiji's interpenetrational self. It is 'neither monistic or dualistic' (Taylor, 1993, 66). We are one with all things (absolute) and we are uniquely ourselves (absolutely relative). We are absolute (singular/unique) and as interpenetrating all things and all things interpenetrating ourselves, we are also absolute (whole). We are each one of us held firm in the middle, between body-mind, between material-ideal, between self-things, between self-other. In a sense, we stand on that very between space that negates both and conjoins both simultaneously, especially our dichotomous thinking about these oppostites (Heisig,2001, 228).

The overcoming of dialectical thinking and the separation of the world into discreet things split down the middle by inner and outer, is found in a

thorough realisation of *egoteki* or *muga* by each and every one of us, which is none other than the realisation of the non-self, which is in effect a realisation that takes place on the non-dual field of *śūnyatā*.[91] *Śūnyatā*, as a field, binds each thing to each thing, as they reciprocally interpenetrate each other, constituting each other; but *śūnyatā* "itself" is not a thing, it is a term used to describe the true reality of each no-self that comes to realise itself on that same field of *śūnyatā*, i.e., *śūnyatā* itself is *śūnyatā* (RN, 106). This interpenetrational nature of existence, is one which allows for a maximum of fluidity between things (in Luce Irigaray's terms), while making sure that each thing remains absolutely itself. It is hard to see where Luce Irigaray might have a problem with non-duality understood in these terms.

For this realisation to occur we must no longer be attached to ourselves, or to things, or to concepts – body and mind must drop off. It is a separate dualistic self that lacks and requires things in order to fulfil itself. This is the desiring self, an ego, who desires things to complete themselves. This lack is in fact premised on a dualistic understanding of self and world. A self that is whole (absolute) and unique (absolute) is no longer bound by attachments to self-concepts, ideology or tangible things. The no-self is precisely this non-attached self, the pure subject that does not desire to possess. The non-dual experience is an overcoming of the inner and the outer and with it we are no longer bound to anything, even our own identity. Each thing is its own, belonging and bound to no one. Again, we can see clearly that this is precisely

[91] Unfortunately, Nishitani Keiji describes this as a 'field of force' (RN, 150-151) which we must be wary not to interpret metaphysically. See Mark C. Taylor's critique in *Nots* (1993).

one dimension which Luce Irigaray is putting forward through her image of the Buddha. The non-attached/non-possessive man, will allow space for woman to become a subject, and not confine her to being an object for himself.

We can recall that the term for "itself" in Japanese is *jitai* (K.自体) which can be translated as itself, one's own body, one's self, or as originally, by nature, in the beginning, from the start. It is when we are at home to ourselves (ourselves as interpenetrative or *muga*) that the self exists firmly in the 'middle' realised as its own reality. These terms can be contrasted to *jittai* (K. 実体) which is to understand something as a substance or an object, and also to *shutai* (K. 主体) which is the philosophical term used to understand something from the position of the subject as in Kantian thought (Unno, 1989, 308). Interestingly all of these terms use the kanji for body, posture or physique (体). Hence, in Nishitani Keiji's terms we have a standpoint. It is a bodily perspective, but a body understood on a different field of existence, i.e., a divine body. Once again, I see this being completely in-tune with Luce Irigaray's understanding of what is required for a man's emancipation, and moreover, for a pure subject whether man or woman.

And now perhaps we can understand the rather cryptic statement that Nishitani Keiji wants to make philosophy a thinking non-thinking. This of course means a thinking which takes place on the field of emptiness, a thinking

made by a no-self, that is a self no longer bound by the ego, and therefore, no longer a philosophy from the standpoint of a self-centred and self-attached understanding of the self or *Shutai*. This is position, I believe, is very similar to Luce Irigaray's pure subject. It is a thinking from the vantage point of non-self, a non-dual viewpoint of self-things, self-world, self-other, without negating the body or this world where it stands. A standpoint of emptiness is from the transformed body, where:

> 'all attachment is negated: both subject and the way in which things appear as objects of attachment are emptied. Everything is now truly empty, and this means that all things make themselves present here and now, just as they are, in their original reality' (RN, 34)

We think ordinarily that we perceive things and ourselves in the right manner, whereas Nishitani Keiji's point is that we see things from the prejudiced position of the subject as ego who is separate from the world of objects. When this duality drops away, we are not left with relative nothingness (this is the interim stage of nihility where all things become non-differentiated, a sort of philosophical dark night of the soul) nor are we ourselves nothing and non-differentiated in a oneness as Luce Irigaray fears, we are in fact truly ourselves for the first time and therefore we can perceive and think clearly for the first time:

> '*śūnyatā* is the point at which we become manifest in our own suchness as concrete human beings, as individuals with both body and personality. And at the same time, it is the point at which everything around us becomes manifest in its own suchness' (RN, 90)

This position of the non-self is one of true freedom for Nishitani Keiji. A true freedom found in the body, from where we are emancipated from our misunderstanding and our conceptual conflicts:

> 'for as long as we do not step beyond the field of a fundamental separation of subject and object, a conflict between considering the object from the standpoint of the subject and considering the subject from the standpoint of the object will arise' (RN, 35)

Nishitani Keiji's position of no-self, or non-ego, which is in essence a self grounded on non-attachment to itself or any concept or thing, because it exists as the absolute, right there in the middle and therefore is free from desire, is precisely the opposite of the Western liberal view of desire, where the subject pacifies itself on the field of self-consciousness with an endless stream of distractions (or of course, the other option, whereby we become mere objects in a mechanized world beyond our control.) Each of us is detached from any notion of our existence, we are unbound and unshackled, we are free from inner and outer, free from non-differentiation, by virtue of being free from

misunderstanding ourselves on either the field of duality (self-consciousness) or the field of non-differentiation (nihility). This is emancipation according to Nishitani Keiji's Buddhist way of thinking, and this is the realisation of *śūnyatā* as a self who is a non-self, or I might suggest, a pure subject in Luce Irigaray's terms.

So how can we conceive of this relationship between self and things without falling back into a dualism with its inherent conflict and dynamic of domination/subordination? Nishitani Keiji uses the terms master and attendant to explain the paradox and it ultimately is also used to understand our relationship to another self and non-self as we shall see in the following chapter. Here I succumb to the temptation to quote at length and leave it for the reader to fathom his words for themselves:

> 'That beings one and all are gathered into one, while each one remains absolutely unique in its "being," points to a relationship in which … all things are master and servant to one another. We may call this relationship, which is only possible on the field of *śūnyatā*, "circuminsessional" [interpenetrational].
>
> To say that a certain thing is situated in a position of a servant to every other thing means that it lies at the ground of all other things, that it is a constitutive element in the being of every other thing, making it to be what it is and thus to be situated in a position of autonomy as

master of itself. It assumes a position at the home-ground of every other thing as that of a retainer upholding his lord. The fact that A is so related to B, C, D … amounts, then, to an absolute negation of the standpoint of A as master, along with its uniqueness and so, too, its "being." In other words, it means that A possesses no substantiality [*jittai*] in the ordinary sense, that it is a non-self nature [*jitai*]. Its being is a being in unison with emptiness, a being possessed of the character of an illusion.

Seen from the other side, however, the same could be said respectively of B, C, D, … and every other thing that is. That is to say, from that perspective, they all stand in a position of servant to A, supporting its position as master and functioning as a constitutive element of A, making it what it is. Thus, that a thing *is* – its absolute autonomy – comes about only in unison with a subordination *of* all other things. It comes about only on the field of *śūnyatā*, where the being of all other things, while remaining to the very end the being that it is, is emptied out. Moreover, this means that the autonomy of this one thing is only constituted through a subordination to all other things. Its autonomy comes about only on a standpoint from which it makes all other things to be what they are, and in so doing is emptied of its own being' (RN, 148)

Śūnyatā is the field where nihility itself is negated, leaving us thoroughly on a field of non-duality, where each thing is as it is, while being wholly interconnected through each thing's mutual interpenetration with every

other thing. We can see then that this is not a reduction of everything to the same; it is to realise that we are constituted by all things and we constitute all things, while at the same to realise simultaneously the uniqueness of each and every one, and thing. This means that each one of us is both master and servant to each thing and each other at one and the same time. This is a paradoxical realisation and it is one we must existentially grasp right down to our fundamental self-understanding.

5.9. Concluding remarks

What I have focused on in this and the previous chapter are practices which effect the relation between the body, the breath and the senses, to nature, birth, death and seeing life. It is clear that these practices are effected by gender/sex differences, and how we view them depends on our standpoint of interpretation as an I-he or an I-she. I am now tentatively able to envision a pure male and pure female subject, and therefore, two possible self-understandings with different paths for working out the subject-object configuration, which constituted them as I-he and I-she in the first place.

However, even if an I-he or I-she come to stand on a bridge between birth and death, from where either can see life and re-integrate themselves with a fluid relation to nature as sexuate on a field of *śūnyatā*, it is still not completely clear whether they can both equally follow Nishitani Keiji's mode of inquiry and

Buddhist infused philosophical practices. We have established that his oneness is not mere non-differentiation, but we are still left pondering if sexuate difference is erased by the insight of *śūnyatā*? It appears to be too radically inclusive, but I have shown that there is the potential of holding sexuate difference on the field of *śūnyatā*. Finally, to phrase it as a question: is man-woman another dualism which will be overcome in the realization of *śūnyatā?* To know this we must ask a prior question: is *śūnyatā* available to men and women?

6

Interpreting the myth of Mary between East and West

6.1. Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to analyse Nishitani Keiji's 'Eastern' influenced re-interpretation of the myth of the virgin birth, which overcomes the division between nature and spirit, and to see where this leaves the two sexes in relation to each other in *śūnyatā*. Nishitani Keiji does not go in to detail here, and he doesn't take this into the realms of articulating any sexuate difference, or any relationship between the two sexes, or if the two sexes are neutralized in *śūnyatā* for instance; but he does lay the groundwork for that, along with an interesting discussion of virginity. My work here then is to think through how the two sexes relate to each other if they are 'grounded' on/in *śūnyatā*. In effect I want to take his thought a stage further while going in a slightly different direction: towards a meeting between him and Luce Irigaray, where we might bring together the insights of sexuate difference as found in Luce Irigaray, and *śūnyatā* as found in Nishitani Keiji, and envision two standpoints of non-he and non-she.

There are two principle points of Luce Irigaray's thought which we must address here in this chapter to complete my creative juxtaposition of her and Nishitani Keiji's thought. The first, is the importance of virginity for the establishment of a female subject. The second, is how the myth of Mary, for her, offers a different way of weaving together the breath, the body and speech, while offering a model for intersubjective relations between two sexes who are different, i.e., the couple. These shall be woven together with further supplements from Nishitani Keiji's own thought, specifically concerning the 'I-Thou' relationship, so that we might come to a final position between them, concerning virginity, sexuate difference, *śūnyatā* and intersubjective relations. I begin with Nishitani Keiji's surprising thought on virginity.

6.2. Nishitani Keiji: Men and women in puritas

We have seen already Luce Irigaray's use of myth, and their reinterpretation through the lens of sexuate difference, to elucidate her own ideas on the self and our current cultural predicament. However, we have yet to touch on one of the most important dimensions of Nishitani Keiji's thought: his re-interpretation of myth to gain insights into our self and reality, and our current epoch's predicaments.

In 1961, Nishitani Keiji wrote a contribution to the 'Demythologizing debate' (a debate which took place between Bultmann and Jaspers) in

connection to Rudolf Bultmann's thesis on New Testament Hermeneutics. We shall not examine this debate here, although Nishitani Keiji himself briefly analyses it in the opening section of his essay.[92] Bultmann is another – this time Theologian – heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger, whose demythologizing includes existential interpretation:

> 'To demythologize meant, in a general way, to strip away from the New Testament its antiquated world view, its objectifying conceptuality, its spatial and cosmological imagery. To engage in existentialist interpretation meant to set free the original understanding of existence offered in the New Testament proclamation from its mythological conceptuality through an expression in a form conceptually appropriate to it, i.e., the existentialist anthropological categories of Martin Heidegger' (Johnson, 1974, 2)

Here we shall focus on the section of the essay concerned with the reinterpretation of the myth of the Virgin Mary, and the possibility of what Nishitani Keiji calls a horizontal transcendence which overcomes the division between nature and spirit, and which is quite simply another name for *śūnyatā*.

[92] For an extensive overview of this debate, which is far beyond the bounds of this thesis, please see Johnson *The Origins of demythologizing: philosophy and historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (1974). For a further analysis of Nishitani Keiji, see Heisig (2001, 227, 337).

In the essay entitled 'A Buddhist Voice in the Demythologizing Debate', Nishitani Keiji offers his own thoughts on one of the fundamental myths from the New Testament: the myth of Mary remaining a virgin and giving birth to Jesus, the incarnation of God on earth. He mistakenly calls this the immaculate conception, which we should read as the theological doctrine in relation to the birth of Jesus, and not the theological doctrine concerning the birth of Mary herself.[93] The myth of the virgin birth (of Jesus from Mary) has received significant attention in feminist and gender studies both within and without of Theological circles. Here I do not intend to critique or comment on the Theological tradition as such, nor the feminist critique of this tradition; but rather, to limit my own work to Luce Irigaray's and Nishitani Keiji's interpretations, and how they can supplement each other.

For Nishitani Keiji, myth offers us a manner of recollecting in the present, a way of seeing the world which is 'based on life, or organically animated nature' in a pristine form (PM, 51). It is a form of interpretation therefore, which brings us somehow closer to this elusive "thing" we call life. By re-examining myth not as something from a remote past, but as something which is intuitively closer or more in-tune with life, we can come to glean insights for our time. For him, myth is somehow more intimate to our vital existence, somehow closer to our organically animated nature. This is because for Nishitani Keiji, myth is not some misguided old way of thinking but is in fact

[93] As the translator themselves notes and clarifies in a footnote on page 10 of Nishitani Keiji's article 'A Buddhist Voice in the Demythologizing Debate' (1991). Nishitani Keiji uses the term immaculate conception, by which he refers to the annunciation, that is the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and Mary. The Immaculata Conceptio refers to the virgin conception of Mary by St. Anne. See also Heisig (2001, 227, 337)

'the fountainhead of the present historical cultural life' (PM, 52). We see then again that shared interest of fathoming, what is life? And interestingly, we see Nishitani Keiji discussing it in relation to birth; specifically, virgin birth.

To investigate the myths of various cultures, therefore, is to examine the birth of those cultural horizons that in part constitute us, in a way which is intuitively and intimately closer to us. Myths, as we saw in Luce Irigaray too, allow us to open up the possibility of an interpretation from a standpoint which can offer us existential insight into ourselves and our current situation, even if those myths originated thousands of years ago. In this sense we can see his continuation of Bultmann's own project and draw clear parallels between Nishitani Keiji's thinking and the field of psychoanalysis, which also creatively re-interprets myth to be able understand ourselves in the present era. For him, the re-interpretation of myth is 'to return to the mythical world as the genesis of every culture, namely, as an origin from which every culture came, as from the mother's womb' (PM, 52). An interesting image, considering Luce Irigaray's use of the concept of a cultural placenta, and moreover, that one of his major essays on myth affords us a re-interpretation of the myth of the virgin Mary's conception.

In the essay, Nishitani Keiji's interpretation immediately sets up a juxtaposition of two perspectives on the myth of the virgin mary; on the one side, it is fundamental to theology and religion, while on the other side, it is absolutely unacceptable to scientific thinking. Herein lies the choice of this

myth, for it exemplifies the contemporary debate between religion and science.[94] On the one hand, a virgin birth is the most unacceptable of claims for a man and woman to believe in our modern epoch of scientific thinking (BVD, 10). And on the other hand, it is an origin myth, crucial to theology and Christianity, which he sees as an important part of this very cultural horizon that constitutes us, and which is unacceptable to our modern scientific ears. The main point for us to grasp here is that Nishitani Keiji's intention is to set up a juxtaposition of two different ways of seeing the origin myth of Christianity, one spiritual and one material, i.e., one according to theological thinking and one according to scientific thinking, which then leads us to an impasse. Therefore, what we need is a new interpretation which can hold together both viewpoints at once. To deal with this impasse Nishitani Keiji asks if there isn't a way to give this myth a new meaning, he claims:

> 'there is a way, but only if the conception resulting from sexual relations according to the viewpoint of present day science *and* immaculate conception are recognized as two absolutely contradictory but coterminous events. The woman who has conceived and has thus lost her virginity, must *at the same time* remain a virgin' (BVD, 12-13)

[94] Nishitani Keiji claims, 'the problem of religion and science is the most fundamental problem facing contemporary man' (RN 46). Throughout his life, he considered this dialogue between the two disciplines (or the impossibility of dialogue between these two disciplines owing to their separation by an abyss) to be the most significant debate of his time. It is in fact precisely this reason why he has chosen this myth, because it strikes at the heart of the debate between religious and scientific world views.

The example of a standpoint of *śūnyatā* is set out here through his re-interpretation of the myth of the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary. For us to grasp this I must quote at length Nishitani Keiji's continuation:

> 'The woman who has conceived and thus lost her virginity, must *at the same time* remain a virgin. If we understand this as the new "meaning" of the myth, in every "maculate," or "stained," woman there would always be a final dimension that is wiped of each and every stain. It is therefore, unacceptable to split body and spirit into two parts and to understand the whole in a spiritual way whereby the woman "stained" in the physiological sphere, is unstained in the spiritual sphere. In the problem of the virgin birth we are dealing with the locus of the physiological-natural, and not the spiritual. The phenomenon that we define and attempt to understand with the word "staining" must be seen from the unity and the whole that each human being is before it is split into the two spheres of the natural and the spiritual. This staining must be understood from the ground in which every woman is a whole and self-contained human being' (BVD, 13)

Now, we could simply dismiss the idea of staining and impurity of a woman through loss of virginity as being a false understanding and claim that all of this is just misguided musings on an out-of-date way of thinking; but, if we did that, we might miss something more interesting. We should remember that this is Nishitani Keiji's reading of the theological tradition, and not

necessarily his own position or choice of terms. What he is doing is reinterpreting the terms of that tradition and appropriating them according to his own insight; and in doing so, rather than rejecting, he rejuvenates tradition through dialogue. Therefore, let us continue to follow his trail of thought further:

> 'The circumstance that the woman, however stained she may be, is at the same time unstained, this belongs to that final dimension indicated above. When the whole is divided into the two spheres of the natural and the spiritual, various distinctions are made. For example, a person impure in the area of the physiological-natural can be pure in the area of the spiritual; a person can be impure in both areas or pure in both areas; a person can be pure in the area of the physiological-natural, but impure in the spiritual. But we are discussing a purity that lies in the original nature of the person prior to all those distinctions, a purity of absolute "non-differentiation." We are dealing with the absolute purity present in the essence of human being in face of all natural purity and impurity, all spiritual purity and impurity. A man or woman may lose his or her purity in the corporeal and in the spiritual areas, but he or she still possesses that original *Puritas*' (BVD, 13)

It is a very interesting position that Nishitani Keiji is attempting to elucidate through the same terminology of the theological tradition, while attempting at the same time to give this significant origin myth a new meaning.

What he is suggesting is that prior to the interpretation of myth by either the scientific or the theological standpoint (or we might add any other partial interpretation such as sociological, psychoanalytic, critical theory and so on) there is a more fundamental interpretation which is not based on the split between nature and spirit, or what we might call the scientific or religious perspectives, or in philosophical terms materialism and idealism (these are generalisations that Nishitani Keiji tends to make and they are somewhat exaggerated.) However, the point is that this more fundamental ground is one of non-differentiation, which is not nothingness in its relative sense – nihility – but rather nothingness in its absolute sense, that is emptiness or *śūnyatā*. And here, in theological terms, it is absolutely pure, we might say prior to all distinctions of purity and impurity, whether those distinctions are made from the perspective of spirit or nature. In some sense, what he is trying to get across, is that it is probably prior to all interpretation. A place from where a thing, our self, another, or the whole are seen in their original purity, prior to words and language (Heisig, 2003, 227). This is captured in the Latin term *Puritas* which means purity but also, the quality of being whole or complete. It is a standpoint – with all the nuances that Nishitani Keiji gives that word – from which I am whole, where, in this case, both sides of the argument are seen as perspectives and therefore limited, and from where both can be held with openness, simultaneously.

It is therefore, a standpoint which 'transcends' the division of nature-spirit, without leaving the body or the spirit out, or irreparably dividing them, as he states:

> ‘Our division here has obviously transcended the dimensions of the natural and the spiritual. Yet it is impossible for us to imagine something in ourselves which, isolated from the natural and the spiritual, exists separately for itself. The absolutely unstainable part (of the person) does indeed completely transcend the unstained or stained corporeal-spiritual being, but in no way does it separate itself from this being. It is something entirely different from this being, but it is not an entirely different “something.” The absolutely unstainable and the corporeal-spiritual being are two and at the same time entirely one; entirely one and yet at the same time two’ (BVD, 13)

Here we see Nishitani Keiji’s use of the division of one and two, two and one. It is an abstract formulation of the dialectical situation. Metaphorically this was expressed in the classical Buddhist tradition as water and waves. Nishitani Keiji himself uses it in an earlier essay, in his attempt to clarify this elusive concept:

> ‘The waves and the water, it is said, are absolutely inseparable: there are no waves apart from the water and no water apart from the waves. And yet, we can neither call the waves “water” nor call the water “waves.” Water is not waves and waves are not water … both of them, the waves and the water, are simultaneously two-and-one and one-and-two’

(RPEB, 10-11)

He goes on:

> 'Buddhism therefore speaks about "true emptiness." This "emptiness" is the original ground or non-ground which allows all things to be as they exist and to exist as they are. "Emptiness" is nowhere and nevertheless there is "emptiness" everywhere that an entity exists in the whole and the particular. The water, too, is nowhere and nevertheless there is water everywhere that there are ocean waves. The water is neither the *subjectum* which unites all the waves, nor the *subjectum* that is the ground of all the waves' (RPEB, 10-11)

In the image of the water and the waves, as well as, the one-and-two, the two-and-one, the water does not underlie the waves or unite them in a substratum or ground - *Subjectum* here means 'that which is spread out underneath' (RN, 276) – in the same place the waves do not exist separately to the water. Water and waves, waves and water, are inseparable, neither is more primordial or separate and neither of them underlies or grounds the other. At the same time, there are two: water and waves. If we think in terms of water, we negate waves, and if we think in terms of waves we negate water. Water therefore, could be seen as the absolute (whole) here, and waves as the unique individuals or things which are themselves also absolute wholes.

In even more abstract terms then, the one-and-two, the two-and-one, as a way of representing non-duality can be seen in the same manner. The two in the case of the myth of Mary is the corporeal-spiritual. This presupposes a split in the body and the spirit or mind (Heisig, 2001, 227). But more fundamental, is the "absolutely unstainable", a third term which is prior to differentiation, that which is non-dual, and below/behind/beyond (none of these spatial terms really work) all dualistic interpretations of good-bad, internal-external, body-mind, self-other and so on. It is the place, as we have seen, where body-mind drop off, where all false distinctions and fantasies fall away. At the same time this is not a "something" which is separate from that corporeal-spiritual nexus. It is not a substratum or underlying substance. It has no independent existence, and it must be existentially realised between two opposites, for it to be possible. Before further commentary, I continue to quote at length:

> 'What consequences can be drawn if we assume in the fundamental nature of human existence an unlimited and simple immaculateness that transcends both what is stained and what is unstained (in body and in spirit), and if we must therefore assume that a man or a woman can only be comprehended in his or her true concrete wholeness when he or she is seen as a being that bears such a fundamental nature in itself? If we think along these lines, we can see the simple and absolute unstainedness in "one-ness" with the stained or

unstained body or in "one-ness" with stained or unstained spirit' (BVD, 15)

Here we see that the perspectives of nature and spirit, stained or unstained, are 'transcended' by a standpoint that is realised by the whole concrete human being. It is an immanent transcendence, what he calls in *Religion and Nothingness (1983)* a trans-descend, or sometimes trans-descendence.[95] It is in effect a transcending by going down; a passing through, rather than a rising above. In other words, it is a going beyond or a surpassing of an impasse or a breach without transcending it in the usual sense of that term, but rather by going down into it or under it. (Again, these spatial references don't really do justice to what he is attempting to communicate.) The point is that this realisation does not take place somewhere else, but right here in the middle, where we are. It is *śūnyatā*.

But surely this is abstract faulty thinking? Or is it not just a deeper form of idealism? Or even worse, is it not mere wishful thinking? He asks himself this latter question, to which he replies "no" because:

'Actually, this approach, which produces true self-knowledge of a man or woman in the existential return to this dimension and opens up

[95] See Van Bragt (1983, 304-305)

> this dimension by means of a breakthrough along the path of existential knowledge, runs like a broad current through the history of the human race. This is the approach and attitude of that religion which teaches salvation (as a means of liberation) through self-knowledge, namely Buddhism. It is also clear that various attempts have been made along these same lines in ancient western history as well' (BVD, 15-16)

For him, it is an existential breakthrough that gives us an insight into this immaculate virginal quality that lies at the heart of each of us, men and women. Nishitani Keiji favours the Buddhist approach, but he sees from testimonies across all traditions cases of such existential insights recorded and passed down. This wisdom is, for him, a passage between traditions to use Luce Irigaray's terminology. Therefore, it is not only a Buddhist approach that can offer this insight into one's own nature; but what is required without doubt, or beyond doubt, is an insight into our own self-nature (i.e., *jinen*). A nature which for him is *egoteki*: reciprocal mutual interpenetration. And, as we saw, for Nishitani Keiji, this is exemplified by a standpoint of Zen, a standpoint which he is attempting to elucidate philosophically; and we might say in more general terms, to shift the philosophical hermeneutic approach so that it includes such possibilities as existential insight through meditative practice. Here he considers that this approach was already widespread in Antiquity and across traditions, and that we need to reinvent it for our own times through cross-cultural dialogue and practice, in order to deal with the lopsided interpretations, which prejudice either traditional interpretations and their approach to myth, or scientific interpretations and their rejections of myth.

For Nishitani Keiji, the existential insight into our virginal immaculate nature is what he calls first in this essay a non-nature and 'horizontal transcendence'. We do not need to struggle to understand this however, because ultimately it is of course to be understood as *śūnyatā*. As he states, 'this standpoint revealing itself in the "horizontal transcendence" is the "Buddhist notion of emptiness" (*śūnyatā)* expressed in the formula: "form is emptiness, emptiness is form"' (BVD, 22). We can recall that Unno clarified this pithy saying for us earlier in the thesis:

> 'It is not the case that the two are simply merged or collapsed into one; rather, when emptiness is affirmed, form is negated; and when form is affirmed, emptiness is negated. When this simultaneous negation and affirmation occurs not only among two things, A and B, but among multiple realities, infinitely and boundlessly, we have what is called "non-obstructed interrelationship"' (1989, 317)

And for Nishitani Keiji, it is a standpoint from where:

> 'a fundamental and complete demythologizing of all myths and an "existentialist" interpretation of mythological concepts are possible only in the break through to the horizon of absolute "emptiness" or

absolute “nothingness”’ (BVD, 22)

Therefore, it is this existential breakthrough which appears possible for any woman or man, for any mother or child. It is an insight which is open to all human beings in their concrete existence, their fundamental existence from where their ultimate horizon of understanding is possible. It is a standpoint which:

> ‘brings us face to face with real, concrete human meaning. When a man or woman awakens to his or her own Buddhahood, the Buddha-existence itself awakens out of and in him or her, and he or she becomes a truly more original, more concrete human being, a “true human being,” to use the expression of the Chinese Zen master Lin-Chi. If such is the essence of the human being, then both the child born into the world as well as the mother bearing it are completely unstained in their very “human” stainedness’ (BVD. 17)

We are all born with this “quality” or potential for our own self-realisation as *śūnyatā* irrespective of whether we born as men or women. Or in the words of Zen Master Bankei: ‘we are unborn precisely as corporeal-spiritual existences, by virtue of our being born from parents’ (BVD, 17). There is no insight into the true nature of our existence without being born, and because we are born as corporeal-spiritual existences, we can realise that our true nature is

in fact unborn. It is *śūnyatā*, understood as reciprocal interpenetration, which means that we negate name and form in favour of the formless, which simultaneously affirm name and form in their unimpeded (we might say un-interpreted) formless suchness. We are born (virginal) precisely because we are from unborn (virginal) parents. In (non) metaphysical terms, we are *śūnyatā* and at the same time we are name and form. This is the double exposure of our existence. If we side with name and form we negate *śūnyatā*, if we side with *śūnyatā* we negate name and form. We are constantly oscillating between these two, none more so than between moments of silent sitting meditation, or when simply breathing, or in our dynamic interaction in ordinary everyday activities. I would like to draw out two key points here which take us into our comparison with Luce Irigaray.

The first is the overcoming of the division between nature and spirit on the field of *śūnyatā*. As we saw in the previous chapter, this overcoming of nature and spirit was the main purpose behind Luce Irigaray's Buddha imagery. For Nishitani Keiji too, at the fundamental ground of ourselves as human beings, for women and for men, we are neither nature nor spirit; but rather, at a more fundamental or elemental level, we are both nature and spirit, we are neither nature and spirit, and we are whole or complete concrete human beings. To confuse men with spirit and women with nature, setting up a hierarchical dichotomy which can be manipulated by the so called higher standpoint, would be a confusion on a horizon of understanding which is prejudiced towards one side over the other. And what is more, it would lead us to an impasse in our self-understanding, that is our fall into self-misunderstanding on a partial

prejudiced field of self-interpretation, which negates at least half of humanity.

The understanding being put forward here is that men and women are both nature and spirit and neither nature or spirit. This is a standpoint of *śūnyatā*, and a standpoint which sees both men and women as already whole, prior to being differentiated by an interpretation from a standpoint based on an understanding from either side of the nature or spirit divide. It is a standpoint that supercedes nature-spirit where the fundamental concrete human being, whether man or woman, is whole and complete when they realise their virginal purity, their absolute unstainedness, that is their true self nature as *śūnyatā*. In short, as we have seen, each one of us is, at our root, reciprocally interpenetrating each other at all times (prior to all interpretive distinctions) which are based on or from a standpoint of an isolation of one part of this whole; usually, the objective scientific position, or the position of an ego-subject in Western philosophical terms. It is difficult to not see that this as a similar interpretation to Luce Irigaray's pure subject, with the one qualification that we must have male and female pure subjects, and not a neutral pure subject.

We could argue of course that there are other options here, why not simply reject the dichotomy out rightly? Because this would most probably result in an implicit materialist view (as the prevailing view of our times) which is actually a denial of one side of the dichotomy (and what would tend to happen in any time, when one side of the dichotomy is denied, i.e., we tend towards the already accepted prejudice in our attempt to flatten out the two into one. In Luce

Irigaray's terms, we reduce everything to the same which ends in nihilism). Or we could try to argue for one side of the dichotomy, and then ground both men and women on that side, for example, the materialist view which is most prevalent in Europe today. Or we could try to balance the nature-spirit equation by seeing all men and women as nature-spirit, thereby not identifying one side, say nature, with woman; and the other side, say, spirit with man – this is in fact closer to what Nishitani Keiji is getting at. However, to balance the two, for him, we must have an encompassing concept such as *śūnyatā*. This is a unifying concept that mediates the two terms by grounding them in their underlying greater reciprocal relationship, and the space between the two terms can itself be a place where we stand. It is this what is meant by a 'double exposure'. I am arguing that we need to hold both positions at the same time, while we ourselves remain open and untouched in our *puritas*. We are in the middle, unattached to a viewpoint and able to function on both sides, working perhaps towards a harmonious position between them or being in a position between them where we have already realised in our self-awareness a place to stand that is free from duality. In effect, we place ourselves in that between space, a place right in the middle, complete as ourselves amidst the world through a negation of both sides of interpretation, and through the negation of our limited self-centred self, a more original extensive self is affirmed which is at the centre of everything (Heisig, 2003, 228).

The second point, which is connected to the last, is that Nishitani Keiji considers all women and men to be virgins at the absolute level. And this means both men and women are capable of realising their *puritas* or concrete

wholeness as *śūnyatā*. There is a clear shift in the text, from one interpretation as a singular event being an origin myth for Christianity which gives some special significance to the birth of the saviour; to another interpretation that holds a truth for all of us:

> 'In the sense that we have described here, all of us are born of a "virgin." Our physical mother was such a virgin at the time of our conception and birth, for even then, when she was no longer a virgin, she possessed in the essential ground of her being that absolute unstainable character, that *pura proprietas*' (BVD, 17)

For Nishitani Keiji, this myth demonstrates something which is universal. For him, 'the fact that we have been born of a mother – this fact in itself – has no other sense than to show at the same time that we have all been born from a "virgin"' (BVD, 17). These mythical statements, therefore, are about all human beings, not a special human being (BVD, 20). And if they are about all human beings then we are getting down to some fundamental structures of human existence (modern hermeneutics) and in this case, that fundamental existence is described as immaculate or virginal and it is at the ground of both men and women: it is a revaluation of birth, and the body. A comparative philosophical hermeneutics which leads us to a potentially heretical affirmation that we are all on a par (or at least capable of being) with Jesus and Mary. In short, they become very accessible models for men and women in this life, as we will see below, this is precisely what Luce Irigaray wants to suggest also.

6.3. Luce Irigaray: sexuate difference and virginity

As we have seen above, Nishitani Keiji combines his thought of *śūnyatā* with the idea of virginity as an original *puritas* open to both men and women. However, contrary to Nishitani Keiji, before we find some original purity from where men and women can meet, Luce Irigaray thinks that virginity must first be rethought from the position of its value to women, and only later from its value to all. For her, the cultivation of a female subject through the reclamation of virginity is crucial (Joy, 2006, 93).

Feminine culture must define a woman's virginity according to her own definition (i.e., not a definition imposed from a masculine culture) as she states, 'virginity has been discussed above all by men, or by women in relation to them, but few women have done so in relation to themselves and in the context of female evolution' (KW, 161). For her, a feminine definition can also be enshrined as a civil identity in and through law, thereby establishing different rights for women and men within society (JTN, 86-87, TD, 61). It is one of the events that marks a woman's becoming more significantly than a man's (DBT, 131-132). But, for Luce Irigaray, it can also be 'the name for a return of the feminine to the self, for the spiritual interiority of woman, capable of staying woman and of becoming more and more woman' (KW, 161). Virginity then is to be understood as something particular to a woman's bodily becoming, her rhythm, her civil identity, and also her spiritual identity, i.e., becoming divine (Joy, 2006, 70). Virginity for Luce Irigaray then, in the first instance, is not the

same for a man as it is for a woman, and for her it needs to be re-thought from a feminine cultural perspective first.

However, Luce Irigaray goes further than these initial philosophical positions. For her, in the second instance, virginity is also understood as the fidelity of men and women to their own respective gender, and as the ground or space (or silence) between two who are different to be able to respect each other as different (TBT, 111). With this definition I think we come closer to Nishitani Kejiji's own understanding of sexual difference which we saw above. Luce Irigaray outlines two points for a woman's spiritual and material development. Firstly, she states that,

> 'What I've found to be most important to sustain spiritual progress in my life as a woman can be summarized in the following way: 'The idea that I was born a woman but I must become the spirit or soul of this body I am. I must open out my female body, give it forms, words, knowledge of itself, a cosmic and social equilibrium, in relation to the environment, to the different means of exchange with others, and not only by artificial means that are inappropriate to it' (JTN, 116)

Here we see then that first, a woman's pathway is one specific to her body and her gender – it is a path of sexuation which is appropriate to her and her own rhythms. Furthermore, we also hear that it is about cultivating a soul,

that is, something divine and in the body. (Both of which I discussed earlier.) In the same text, Luce Irigaray goes on to elaborate a second point, the role that virginity plays in a woman's sexuation:

> 'The idea that virginity and maternity involve spiritual dimensions that belong to me. These dimensions have been colonized by masculine culture: virginity has become the object of commerce between fathers (or brothers) and husbands, as well as a condition for the incarnation of the masculine divine. It has to be rethought as a woman's possession, a natural and spiritual possession to which she has a right and for which she holds responsibilities' (JTN, 116-117)

Here we see that for her, a woman's natural and spiritual possession can be conceived by her as her virginity. Previously, it has been possessed by masculine culture, and it needs to be reclaimed as a territory which she can claim for herself, and one which demarcates her identity which is different to a man's (see Joy, 2006, 93). Nishitani Keiji's thought of *śūnyatā* as *puritas* or virginity for both men and women then, is clearly unacceptable for Luce Irigaray as it is a woman's identity that she is concerned with cultivating here. She goes on:

> 'Virginity must be rediscovered by all women as their own bodily and spiritual possession, which can give them back an individual and

collective identity status (and, among other things, a possible fidelity in their relationship with their mother, which would thereby escape the commerce between men). Maternity must be thought of in its spiritual dimension, not only its material one. This is perhaps easier to imagine and carry out. Though not between mothers and daughters?

Women must develop a double identity: virgins and mothers. At every stage of their lives. Since virginity, no more than female identity, isn't simply given at birth. There's no doubt we are born virgins. But we also have to become virgins, to relieve our bodies and souls of cultural and familial fetters. For me, becoming a virgin is synonymous with a woman's conquest of the spiritual. And it's not always a matter of gaining something more but one of being capable of becoming less. Feeling more free vis-à-vis your fears, fantasies about others, freeing yourself from useless knowledge, possessions and obligations' (JTN, 117)

Virginity therefore, is a possession for women, which marks her as different, if claimed and cultivated for herself; but it is not something a woman is born with, in the usual material or physiological sense that it is meant. Virginity as a cultivated possession is, a negation of fears, fantasies, useless knowledge, possessions and obligations. This second sense of virginity slowly starts to sound similar to her hermeneutic of naivete, and also, similar to Nishitani Keiji's *puritas*. Elsewhere, Luce Irigaray expands on this idea of virginity as purity which:

> ‘does not signify defensive prudish virginity, as some of our profane contemporaries might take it to mean, nor does it signify an allegiance to patriarchal culture and its definition of virginity as an exchange value between men; it signifies the woman’s fidelity to her identity and female genealogy’ (JTN, 19)

Here she is discussing virginity in relation to female identity and genealogy through an analysis of Greek myth and the element of fire, as found in the home at the hearth, which is attended to and preserved by women. It is fidelity to the genealogy of women and their gender with which she uses the term here. This is seen in the re-establishment of maternal genealogy, and a re-interpretation of maternity, from a feminine perspective (Joy, 2006, 91; Cornell, 1991, 76-77). As well as her own demythologization, where she draws out structures of existence specific to a woman, a great part of this re-interpretation is once again practice based. Luce Irigaray draws again on her yogic and tantric background, by relating it to the practice of breathing as a means of returning to one’s body and cultivating one’s soul as a woman:

> ‘emphasizing breathing instead of wording can also render to engendering its spiritual dimension and it could explain what is a virginity which does not amount to keeping a physiological hymen. If a woman is capable of keeping an autonomous and free breathing, a

breathing which serves not only survival, but to be and become a human, which always includes a spiritual dimension' (CON, 96)

We can see again here that the cultivation of breathing, as we have seen in chapter four, is central to her thought. It is essential for the cultivation of one's self, and to becoming human, if not even divine. It is 'cultivation of the breathing as a manner of gathering with and internalizing oneself' (CON, 94). This form of meditation is not the contemplation of something, for her it is a gathering in, which is a 'turning back before all representations and words to find or find again one's own self. This can provide all that which we are doing with a meditative dimension' (CON, 94-95). This practice is necessary for 'spiritual virginity, of the feminine' (KW, 161) to be discovered and cultivated. And this turning back to one's self sounds very much like a practice such as Zazen, where we gather ourselves in to rediscover our original nature. For her:

'being, staying or becoming a virgin, is to keep oneself

- I *and* myself (I gather myself together)
- I and you-she
- I and you-he
- I among female them
- I in the community

> Keeping one's virginity means not losing oneself in the attraction for the other, nor letting oneself be ruled by the other, but without being aggressive, or simply critical towards this other. It is to give oneself a feminine mind or soul, an internal dwelling, which is not only physical but also spiritual: linked to the breath, to speech, to the mind' (KW, 161)

We see here then that virginity is far more than the act of losing something at one's first sexual encounter. Luce Irigaray redefines virginity in-line with her thought on breathing and speech, while keeping it as a specifically feminine cultural phenomenon. We can note that it is fundamentally intersubjective and not only based on a practice of sitting alone. Although it does appear that there is room for this to be available to both men and women, when she states it is a sense of keeping oneself, one's autonomy, not letting one's self be ruled by the other and so on, she closes this down by maintaining the need for a feminine specific virginity. Elsewhere however, we see how at another level it does relate to both gender's and their fidelity to their gender, as well as the relation between two who are different:

> 'sketching this new horizon in philosophy *[sexuate difference]*, founded upon an inappropriable truth, involves, as a first gesture, a necessary respect for the virginity of the other. It is a prerequisite for establishing a philosophy of sexual difference and of intersubjectivity'

(TBT, 111)[96]

Now at this stage it sounds as if we are still possibly speaking about a woman's virginity as necessary for us to locate or sense this difference between the two sex/genders. But we see how important virginity is for Luce Irigaray, it is a prerequisite for sexuate difference, the foundation of her philosophy. But, in the final sense, I suggest that virginity is indeed for all, as she herself states:

> 'If this were to come about, virginity would not be reduced to a natural reality, would not be ascribed only to the feminine or to the neuter, but would be the other name for the fidelity of each gender to itself, with a respect for the other gender' (TBT, 111)

Here we see then that it is not limited to the feminine when a culture of sexuate difference is established, but in the last sense virginity is another name for the fidelity of either subject to her or his own gender. The subjective fidelity to their own sexuate specific objectivity, through a process of breathing and recollecting or gathering oneself is virginity. It is the necessary condition for any possibility of intersubjective communication between two genders who are different:

[96] My emphasis

> ‘Virginity is, in fact, the necessary condition for the existence of a word which is present here and now between us: woman and man, women and men. Virginity is the other face of an aporia inhabiting a word which heeds sexual difference. The absence of a like discourse suitable for the two genders, the need for an almost absolute silence between them so that they might begin truly to speak to each other: these things which are impossible to say must be said in order to respect the virginity of each person as a proper identity conscious of its limit’ (TBT, 111-112)

And so, we return to the significance of the sexed couple, the intersubjective relations between man and woman, which is only possible between two subjects who are virginal. In the final sense of virginity as understood by Luce Irigaray here there is no doubt that we come close to Nishitani Keiji’s own understanding of virginity as *puritas*. But we see that in his thought these different levels are clearly not included – virginity is for Luce Irigaray, first of all, essential to a woman’s subjective constitution as different to a man’s; but later, in the final sense, virginity as Luce Irigaray uses it, is similar to that sense of *puritas* as we saw in Nishitani Keiji.

For him, it was a term interchangeable with *śūnyatā,* which pointed to a subject as a non-attached self, and which is necessary for any authentic

intersubjective relationship between two human beings (men). For her, this correlates to her understanding of the pure subject of the Buddha. In its final sense, for Luce Irigaray, virginity in the sense of the Buddha as pure subject, appears to be a necessary pre-requisite for each subject to pass through, along with sexuation as I-he or I-she, so that both subjects can then realise themselves through mutual recognition, as two who are different but now capable of love. It is for this reason that she ultimately prefers the model of a sexed couple, such as we saw with (Siva and Parvati) although the Buddha and the flower is also a good model for men in our current epoch, and perhaps a stage we must all pass through along with sexuation. Still, the virgin Mary offers us a different model to that of the Buddha. It is a model of two subjects who are different, and who speak to each other.

6.4. Luce Irigaray's Eastern interpretation of Mary

We can recall, that in her work *between east and west (2002)* Luce Irigaray claimed that, at this time her practice of yoga had taught her four things. One of those concerns the interpretation of the position of Mary in the Christian tradition, especially the interpretation of the Annunciation. In *between east and west (2002)* she juxtaposes the traditional patriarchal interpretation of the Annunciation with her own Eastern influenced interpretation:

> ‘The Annunciation, which precedes the birth of Jesus, can be interpreted in at least two different ways: as the substitution of the word of the celestial Father for corporeal relations, notably of breathing, between two lovers or as the fact that, in order to engender a spiritual child – a possible saviour of the world – the conception of this saviour must be preceded by an announcement through speech and by a response from Mary. It is not a question then of a miraculous birth by a woman who is supposed to have kept her hymen, but of an engendering preceded by an exchange of breath and of words between the future lovers and parents’ (BEW, 52)

Whereas Nishitani Keiji focused on the question of virginity in the conception of Jesus, Luce Irigaray focuses on intersubjective relations between a man and a woman – because the Lord is conceived as male, and he asks Mary to have his child, to allow him to incarnate himself, i.e., we have a dialogue between a divine man and a divine woman, which produces a divine child (albeit a boy). For Luce Irigaray, along with a dialogue between two divine sexuate subjects, it is the dual quality of Mary as virgin and mother, and the relation between body, breath and speech in dialogue with another, which are most important here. For Luce Irigaray, the patriarchal tradition codifies words into texts and discourses, forgetting the living quality of speech, because of a failure to understand the relation between the body and breath, silence and words:

> ‘it is important to meditate on the fact that a spirituality or a

> religion centred on speech, without insistence on breathing and the silence that makes it possible, risks supporting a nonrespect for life.... Unfortunately most patriarchal philosophical and religious traditions act in this way: they have substituted words for life without carrying out the necessary links between the two' (BEW, 51)

Here we see a direct link to her thought on the Buddha. For her, and as we saw in the Buddhist tradition too, the Buddha's practices of breathing and sitting in silence were the most important, along with his most important gesture: to return to the natural (or vegetal) where he could honour his rhythm within the macrocosm as a pure subject who renounces objective discourse. Here, with the virgin Mary, we see a model more concerned with mediation. For her, mediation is crucial as a way of ensuring a flow between subjects who are different (men and women), dialectical categories, the body and nature, breath and words. This is because, much like the Buddhist understanding of interdependent origination, no "thing" exists in isolation, cut off from everything else. As we saw with her thought on nature and the body, and as we see here, each and everything flows into another. However, as we saw, words and discourses can punctuate this flow between things and stultify our existence, leaving us lifeless. A return to ourselves, and an understanding of the flow between ourselves and others, things, etc. are the two models we find here encapsulated in the Buddha and the Virgin Mary respectively.

In the case of the Annunciation, the mediations between the body of

Mary and the Lord, are 'the angel, the bird, the ray of sun, and speech' (BEW, 52). The aim is that the body is not substituted by words; rather a flow between, body and speech, which recognises and preserves both, creating a spiritual engendering through the 'play of breathing and the controlled expression of this breathing between lovers' (BEW, 52). We can see then that it is the intersubjective quality and the play between body and speech, which includes breath and silence, is most import for her model of Mary and the Lord. It is not the issue of Mary's virginity as such, but rather the mediations and quality of the relationship between Mary and the Lord. This is interpreted as the relationship between a divine man and divine woman. This leads us to her understanding of the between two or the couple as a model for sexuate difference. Here the example is of a divine couple. Elsewhere she succinctly offers us an interpretation of the Annunciation, as God's question to Mary, as two lovers, and which is tied together with the breath and tantric thought of *chakras*:

> 'Mary, you who, from adolescence, are divine, because you were born of a woman faithful to herself – Anne, the one said to have conceived without sin – you who are this capable of intersubjectivity, the expression of love between humans, do you want to be my lover and for us to have a child together, since I find you worthy of this even though you are young, inexperienced and without possessions. It is only thanks to your *yes* that my love and my son may be redemptive. Without your word, we may not be carnally redeemed or saved. Such an interpretation of the Annunciation, which is how I now view it, is supported by the

tradition of the physical and spiritual centers of the body, the *chakras*' (ILTY, 140)

Here we have a very different interpretation of the Annunciation made by Luce Irigaray. Once more I re-iterate that my interest in not in analysing this in comparison to the theological tradition, but rather in bringing it into dialogue with Nishitani Keiji. Much like Nishitani Keiji's interpretation then, it is an alternative interpretation with Eastern influences. Here, the focus is that Mary is divine and born of a virgin: being a virgin and being born of a virgin is linked to becoming divine (Joy, 2006, 70). Luce Irigaray points us towards seeing Mary as a partner in dialogue with the Lord: she is asked, and an exchange takes place between them. Moreover, she is the lover of the Lord. As we saw with Nishitani Keiji also, this points to a raising up of Mary to a parallel with Jesus. It could even be seen as going one step further by Luce Irigaray, however, as a move to place Mary in a more important position than Jesus within the Christian tradition, because the incarnation is dependent on Mary's own divine origin (virgin birth) and her verbal consent as a lover of God.

There is one more key claim which Luce Irigaray puts forward here which we must take note of. It concerns the intersubjective quality of the relationship; because the Lord knows his own desire, interiorizes it and shares it in word and flesh, he can then be:

> ‘a figure surpassing or accomplishing Buddha: the awakened one who is compassionate, agrees to speak, love and engender in order to redeem, as a couple, the whole of the macro and microcosmic universe. With this gesture the Lord actually renounces having, the object, power, in order to accede to being-man and to the realization of intersubjectivity with the being of woman, who is able to retain her virginity. And that alliance, a dual then communal alliance, could incarnate the finality of History, or at least lead the way to another era’ (ILTY, 141)

Here we see then a comparison between her own reading of Buddhism and Christianity, where the Annunciation (not the birth of Jesus) is the most significant event. Moreover, it is an event which surpasses the achievement of the Buddha. The same qualities of compassion and non-attachment are there, but because of its intersubjective quality between two sexuately differentiated subjects in dialogue, the Annunciation, for Luce Irigaray, offers a model of sexuate difference. It is a model which surpasses the pure subject of the Buddha as a non-attached subject, because it is one which involves this dialogue between two subjects who are who are different – the divine couple. We might say in fact, that it is one between two pure subjects who are different (a non-he and a non-she). This question and answer between two who are different, the silence and the breathing between two lovers, who meet each other without attachment or domination, is for her a divine model for intersubjective relations for our time (Joy, 2006, 125). Now, Nishitani Keiji himself also has an intersubjective model, and it would be unfair not to discuss it here in relation to Luce Irigaray’s model of two divine lovers.

6.5. Nishitani Keiji's I-Thou

Nishitani Keiji bases his model for intersubjectivity on the relation between two Zen masters, or between Zen master and disciple. These relations are distinctly bodily and involve often radical or absurd actions and words (Heisig, 2003, 233). For Nishitani Keiji intersubjective relations must be understood through authentic encounters, as Heisig states Nishitani Keiji:

> 'saw in these exchanges not only the spirit of Zen but a paradigm of all authentic encounter between one person and another: namely, an encounter that realizes – actualises and becomes aware of – the reality of the self as it is. As long as one or both parties do remain on the ground of the ordinary ego, only words and ideas can be exchanged. Sharing in experience, speaking "mind to mind" or "heart to heart," requires rather a standpoint of non-ego' (Heisig, 2001, 233)

The Zen encounter therefore, is an encounter between two pure subjects to use Luce Irigaray's terms. Nishitani Keiji lays out this model for authentic intersubjective relations by once again bringing the Zen tradition into dialogue with Western philosophy, this time, Martin Buber and the I-Thou relationship. The 'I and Thou' is a way of framing the ethical relation between

two people, self and other, or self and God. It was first used by Martin Buber in the important and influential text of the same name written in 1923.[97]

In his essay 'The I-Thou relation in Zen Buddhism' (1969) Nishitani Keiji examines three typical ways in which relationships between people (ningen) are usually understood philosophically. The first, is a sort of survival of the fittest where each man is a wolf out to devour the other. The second, is exemplified by Immanuel Kant, where some kind of universal law mediates the relations between subjects. The third, is found in Martin Buber's thought on the I-Thou, where a self is fundamentally transformed by the experience of the absolute other.[98] For him, these three different ways of viewing the relationships between human beings claim that the individual is absolute, and that each subjectivity cannot be replaced by another; while at the same time, there is an understanding based on some universal which does in fact obstruct absolute individuality, as he states:

> 'This universal may take a variety of forms. Where men encounter each other as wolves, the state or its laws might serve to check their individuality. For the ethical man, this function may be performed by practical reason or by moral law. For the religious person, an Absolute

[97] Space does not allow here for a thorough analysis of Martin Buber see Zank, M. and Braiterman, Z. (2014)

[98] For Nishitani Keiji, this position is the highest of the three and is the take off point for his own thought: 'with Martin Buber the interhuman encounter has come to be seen as a personal relationship between "I" and a "Thou." Although the approach no doubt has its own validity, it is far from exhausting the hidden depths of the person-to-person, I-and-Thou, relationship. Where it stops is the very point at which Zen exploration begins' (IT, 41)

> other or divine law may act as the universal ground for the relationships between human beings. But in each case, the general structure of those relationships is conditioned by the universal, and so takes on a kind of halfway quality. The problems this presents is that on the one hand the individual has an irreplaceable subjectivity and hence complete freedom, while on the other, he is simultaneously subordinated to some universal or other. Insofar as all individuals are so subordinated, this would seem to imply that any one individual could take the place of any other' (IT, 41-42)

Nishitani Keiji's analysis here is direct and so condensed that we could easily miss the point: each individual is sovereign or absolute, and that our subjectivity is essentially our absolute uniqueness, our inequality to the other, which is for him our inherent freedom – in Luce Irigaray's terms we might say our autonomy. The problem is, that when we come to philosophize our relations with each other, we have either a clash between these absolute individuals, or we bring in a mediating principle which in fact denies that absolute irreplaceable nature of each of us, which then robs us of our absolute freedom that is our radical difference to each other. What all three of the positions have in common then, is that they compromise absolute individuality and absolute freedom by placing a universal demand on that absolute individuality (Heisig, 2003, 233). In other words, our absolute freedom as an absolute individual is limited by a mediating universal in order for relationships between citizens, or

between ethical or religious men to take place.[99]

Nishitani Keiji elucidates this same point from a number of different angles in his essay (*The I-Thou*) but, one which is especially useful for us here is to understand this in terms of equality and sameness. For Nishitani Keiji, equality implies the possibility of substitution, whereas, freedom implies its impossibility. We should remember here that freedom is uniqueness, our absolute individuality. In contemporary philosophical terms we might equate the term freedom with difference. It is our absolute difference to all others that makes us who we are. We are irreplaceable. This is for him the freedom or meaning of subjectivity: the inability for ourselves to be substituted for or by another. For him, on the one side, a mixture of equality with freedom or difference, 'implies that freedom [or difference] is imperfect' (IT, 42), as he explains: 'as soon as the individual is subject to a universal, he is relativized and loses his absoluteness' (IT, 42). And on the other side:

> 'this imperfect freedom implies as well an imperfect sameness or equality. Subordination to a universal cannot totally absorb or destroy the freedom of the individual as individual. To recover that freedom, unimpeded by law, he may have to escape from the prison of the

[99] Here I use the term religious to mean someone who adheres to a certain creed which informs his or her way of life. It is not religious in the sense that Nishitani Keiji uses the term, as we discussed above. I also use the term men, because all of these philosophical positions are ones made by men and for the regulation of relations between men.

universal' (IT, 42)

In all his previous examples, Nishitani Keiji puts the impossibility of their accomplishment: the state, will never turn the wolf man into a citizen; the moral law, can never fully extinguish a man's self-love; and divine law or God, can never curb a man's appetites nor guarantee that he will not turn his back on God once more (IT, 42). To summarize these two sides of equality and difference, he states that:

> 'for the individual relativized by some universal, both equality and freedom are imperfect. This means that where interhuman relationships are subordinate to such universals, with the result that equality and freedom accompany one another in their incompleteness, no authentic encounter between human beings is possible' (IT, 42-43)

Let us remember that this authentic encounter between different people was the key rallying cry of his East-West encounter. And for an authentic encounter to take place between individuals, according to his thinking, we can explicitly posit that: 1) that our freedom or our difference remains absolute, and 2) that any principle which mediates between human relations shall in no way impede the absolute freedom or difference of each individual. We might say, that any universal must instead guarantee the recognition of each and every individual as a unique free difference, and that this must hold true for all

individuals simultaneously. This of course leads us to an impasse. What is required for us to overcome this impasse is:

> 'an equality in which the negation of the individual and his freedom would become the absolute affirmation of the individual and his freedom. This is of course quite inconceivable, unless seen from the point of view of absolute nothingness, *śūnyatā* – nonbeing in the Buddhist sense of the term' (IT, 43)

Once again then we see that Nishitani Keiji wants to use his standpoint of *śūnyatā,* this time in order to establish a place for the philosophy of self-other relations, and ultimately a non-dual love based on the inherent reality of that absolute self/other relationship. The problem is quite simple, for him:

> 'two factors need to be kept firmly in mind. First, the I and the Thou are absolutes, each in its own respective subjectivity. And second, both I and Thou are, because of their relationship to one another, at the same time absolutely relative' (IT, 41)

According to him then, we are at one and the same time absolute in our difference, while being absolutely relative to each other. Each of us is absolute and in relation to each other we are absolutely relative. In other words, we have

a multiplicity of absolutes within an absolute. For Nishitani Keiji, as we have seen, there are two 'conditions that effect I and Thou as subjects: namely, that they are each absolutes and at the same time absolutely relative' (IT, 44) and for him, 'unless we go back to this point we will be unable to realize either true individual freedom or true universal equality' (IT, 44). He admits, as does Heisig (2001, 233) that this sounds like nonsense, like a contradiction which we cannot accept. Surely, such a position results in the wolf-man, that each man attempts to devour the other? For him this is the source of the suffering of men, the fact that a human being is absolute, but at the same time, they live together as relative absolutes. It may be theoretically impossible, but existentially for him it is a fact: we are each one of us absolute individuals, while at exactly the same time, we are each one of us relative absolutes to each other.

Nishitani Keiji attempts to demonstrate this unlikely position through a Zen dialogue in the I-Thou relation essay.[100] He essentially wants to show us that the I-Thou relation is based on the non-attachment of the self to itself, or in this case its non-attachment to name and form. This non-attachment to self, or self-detachment is where the subject as ego is not clung to, and therefore no split occurs between me and you. If I am completely free from attachment to something which is myself, then when we meet each other on the field of *śūnyatā*, we are free to communicate without hesitation or reservation or fear.

[100] Kyozan Ejaku asked Sansho Enen, "What is your name?"
Sansho said, "Ejaku!"
"Ejaku!" replied Kyozan, "that's my name."
"Well then," said Sansho, "My name is Enen."
Kyozan roared with laughter.
(IT, 40)

We are united in our non-attachment to ourselves. We exist together on a field of *śūnyatā* as a unique point on that field which is itself (both us and it) empty. This is in essence the same position which Nishitani Keiji put forward concerning the relationship between self and things as discussed in the previous chapter. We are each one of us at home in our own nature *(jitai)* and we are empty of any prejudice or attachment to ourselves or desire for things *(muga)*. It means that we exist right there in the middle, and so do you as the other I meet on that same non-dual field of *śūnyatā*.

A Zen dialogue is a literary example of when this absolute recognition of each other occurs in our everyday existence, as he states elsewhere, 'what is opened up in a Zen encounter is a place which in every way serves as the ultimate locale for a meeting between people' (PAZ, 29). When two people meet on the field of *śūnyatā,* it is as if they meet in a place of mutual self-negation and mutual recognition simultaneously. In short, an instantaneous reciprocal recognition. This can only occur when we drop our attachment to ourselves as an ego, a concept, an object or a something. It makes possible a direct communication or a true meeting between a 'you' and an 'I'. I call out to you and you call out to me and for a moment we meet and recognise each other as absolute without fear or reservation or attachment. We could call this mutual recognition in absolute self-negation, but we must remember that absolute self-negation allows for absolute self-affirmation in that moment of mutual recognition. I negate myself as subject or ego, and you return that very negation to me in your affirmation, and vice versa, simultaneously. (We could say the dynamic between the passive and the active are revolving between two people

in mutual self-negation and mutual self-affirmation while in dialogue.) We both exist on the same field absolutely as ourselves when we realise ourselves on the field of *śūnyatā,* a field free from desire, attachment and ego self-centredness. This is (mutual) ego-self-negation resulting in (mutual) non-self-affirmation. It is the paradoxical nature of our actual existence which can only be realised together on the field of *śūnyatā,* which is an actual place, right here in our ordinary everyday existence and activity.

Any fixation by us on one side or the other, causes a basic misunderstanding of ourselves in relation to things and to others. This fluidity of self-relationship and other-relationship is vital for mutual recognition, friendship and love. It is 'to speak of love as non-ego in which the other is "present" as other and not simply as "a projection of one's own ego"' (Heisig, 2001, 234). And how are we to enable such an immediate and reciprocal interchange? For Nishitani Keiji:

> 'all parties must be in full possession of a strong confidence, but at the same time they also require a very fundamental openness for the encounter with the other' (ENR, 144)

Here we see a very clear and everyday understanding of what it means to stand in the middle as one's self while at the same time totally unattached to one's self. Confidence in this sense is to be at home in our body, in one's own

nature (*jitai*) secure and certain through the self-realisation of egoteki or muga; which necessarily means that at the same time, we are radically open to the things of the world, the other and the world as a whole. This radical openness of ourselves as non-self or interpenetrative self, is the field of *śūnyatā*. A field of non-dualism, unbound by prejudices, attachments and self-centredness which allows for the 'I' to be truly an 'I' for the first time, while being completely open to a 'you' who stands before me. 'Non-I' am certain (affirmed) in my own non-self (ego self-negation) which allows me to affirm 'non-you' in your own non-self (ego self-negation). It is a meeting of non-selves, although this term makes no sense whatsoever! It can only be said that it is a meeting on the field of *śūnyatā* where both parties are recognised for their true selves owing to both parties being secure in their own self-negation of the false sense of self which is based on ego-self centeredness, attachment and desire, which arises inescapably when we exist on a field of duality.

6.6. Concluding remarks: virginity and the pure subject

Ultimately, the issue of the virgin Mary being truly a virgin becomes somewhat redundant in Nishitani Keiji's thought. She is pure and impure, but on the more fundamental level she, along with any woman, or any man, is beyond any stain or its absence. She (or He) is already always pure at the deepest level, that is, untouched by any interpretation. Our original face, our true-self, is empty of any substance, stain, guilt or sin. In our original nature we are untouched and untouchable and without division between nature and spirit.

The overcoming of nihilism is the realisation of one's self as reciprocally interpenetrative and recognising one's self and another as fundamentally grounded on this same reality. We might call this innocence, purity, maybe even naivete or being a pure subject, but here it is virginity as *śūnyatā*.

On the one hand, this means that *śūnyatā* understood as absolute virginity, is available for both men and women; while on the other hand, it is not necessarily about conceiving and giving birth anymore (although birth is necessary for us to realise the 'unborn' as we saw.) In the end Nishitani Keiji takes away virginity as an important natural-spiritual defining factor of being a woman, and risks covering over the importance of understanding birth and sexuate difference for our own relational process of self-understanding. For Nishitani Keiji, any distinction between men and women, that might be posited by someone like Luce Irigaray, could be lost on the field of *śūnyatā*.

However, I suggest that each man and woman at the deepest level is in-tune with themselves and reality in accordance with *śūnyatā*. The issue of the virgin Mary being a virgin becomes a means to understand this. She is pure and impure depending on the standpoint of theology or science; but on the more fundamental level, she, along with any woman is beyond any stain or its absence. She is already always pure at the deepest level, that is, untouched by any interpretation. Our original face, our true-self, is empty of any substance, stain, guilt or sin. In our original nature we are untouched and untouchable and without division between nature and spirit. We could phrase this as: she is a

woman, precisely because she is not a woman. She is concrete and whole, when she realises *śūnyatā*, that is, when she is a non-she – a pure female subject.

But then, how are we to hold these distinctions of man and woman? In short, on the field of self-consciousness/nihility men and women are different, for reasons such as the ability to give birth; on the field of emptiness they are united, in themselves, and possibly with each other. In Nishitani Keiji's terms, we can suggest as a way forward, that on the field of self-consciousness/nihility there are men and women, who are born, who are ego-centred desiring subjects, who act and speak and think, and who all walk above an abyss of nihility. On the field of *śūnyatā* men and women are no-thing, non-attached, absolutely free, virginal and untouched, or pure male or pure female subjects to use Luce Irigaray's terms.

We are all born and unborn, we are men and women as name and form, and we are formless reciprocally interpenetrative phenomena. In a sense, we can say that men and women are equal in *śūnyatā* as concrete whole human beings, but still sexuately different when seen from a standpoint on the field of self-consciousness – such as the two standpoints of nature and spirit (neither of which being definably masculine or feminine.) This could be stated as men and women are different from the standpoint of sexuate difference, but the same from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. However, we want to phrase it, it is ungrounded if not touched or tasted by each of us in our own self-realisation, men and women alike.

I hope it is clear then, that although Nishitani Keiji misses the intersubjective quality of the myth he in many ways jumps directly to the final sense of virginity, which Luce Irigaray herself arrives at. The need for the prior stages, however, are made apparent in Luce Irigaray's work, along with the importance of intersubjectivity of pure subjects or divine couples as sexuately differentiated. Luce Irigaray includes a phase of sexuation, and by doing so offers us an authentic existence as a pure subjects in relation to another who is different – a model of the pure male and pure female subject who are always already entwined as intersubjective. Finally, for her, that intersubjective quality is most important (as I have shown, the virgin Mary offers a better example than the Buddha.)

However, in Nishitani Keiji's example of two Zen masters, we also see the necessity of non-self for *any* encounter to take place. This also operates on the level of the body and dialogue. It is another example of the reciprocal relationship which effects each subject to demonstrate their purity or the standpoint of *śūnyatā*. For him, this is also necessary for love to be possible. Ultimately, both he and Luce Irigaray recognise the fundamental relational quality of our existence and the need for our cultivation in-line with this, for any encounter to take place, and for the possibility of love.

Nishitani Keiji's philosophy jumps to a very subtle teaching, without

working through the necessary stages for different sexuate subjects to develop from birth to (sexuate) maturity to existence as a non-self or pure subject. The danger of this, is that we remain in a global discourse between men and continue to slip into the very nihilism which he is trying to creatively overcome, at least according to Luce Irigaray's diagnosis. Even if half the world somehow miraculously becomes a pure subject, to use Luce Irigaray's terms, becoming a non-self, or realising *śūnyatā* alone, may not be enough without the inclusion of the dynamic of sexuate difference and sexed pure subjects both non-he and non-she.

Firstly, then, I want to make clear that we need to reach *śūnyatā* from our starting-points in which we are sexuate, and therefore get to *śūnyatā* from sexuation, not by attempting to bypass or somehow lose sexuation altogether, but rather, to proceed through it. Sexuatation therefore, is essential to *śūnyatā*.

Second, non-duality doesn't involve the total elimination of dual phenomena; rather, their re-incorporation into a broader field of interpenetrations (*śūnyatā*) which does of course lose (what is normally regarded as) the absolute fixity of their dual status, but not in such a way that everything is merged into a oneness of nothingness as understood by Luce Irigaray. In fact, as I have shown, non-duality can incorporate sexuate difference in a way whereby duality is also surpassed, by no longer being a presumed rigid, fixed division.

Without the two standpoints of non-she and non-he, sexuate difference will remain under the critique of essentialism, and *śūnyatā* will remain blind to the fundamental relational quality of sexuate difference, and we, men, women, philopsophers and feminists, east and west will fall into a global nihilism of the same. Creative pathways for self-creation are required, and Eastern practices combined with Western philosophy offer a new way of life which includes the insights of sexuate difference and *śūnyatā*.

Conclusion

This thesis has laid out a process for the liberation of the self by juxtaposing the thought of Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji. This juxtaposition has involved a close hermeneutical reading within the parameters of the emerging discipline of feminist comparative philosophy.

Through this juxtaposition I have argued that the formation of the self must go from the alienated subject, to the sexuate subject, to the pure subject (which transdecends while still including the sexuate) as stages of development in the awareness of a liberated subject who is no longer alienated from themselves. Liberation, therefore, is from alienation, while the process is through relational self-understanding. This liberation is possible because of the inclusion of Eastern practices in a global philosophy, as well as the inclusion of sexuate difference as a philosophical dialogue between men and women in a global philosophy. Global philosophy thereby becomes a vehicle for the unfolding of awareness of both I-he and I-she (as two subjects who are different) and then proceeds to a self-understanding of two pure selves as non-he and non-she who are always sexuately two, and always intimately related, as understood on the field of *śūnyatā* – a field of mutually interpenetrating phenomena.

By reading Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji alongside each other, I located a shared critique of the contemporary understanding of the self which is focused around the objectification of the subject and leads to the problem of nihilism (understood as the loss of values and the inability to create new values). At the most basic level, I agree with Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji that the objectified and mechanical self is a misunderstanding which leads to alienation and nihilism, and I agree with them both that the default self-position in contemporary culture is an isolated subject (understood as the ego) who is objectified and mechanized, and therefore, bound to fall into alienation and a nihilistic world view.

Furthermore, I pointed out that for both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray it is how we conceive, understand and live the relationship between the internal and the external world which is the bottom line for why we fall into alienation and nihilism. For Nishitani Keiji it is a mistake in the relationship between the internal and the external world which causes the objectification of the self and the cultural nihilism which he perceives as all pervasive. For Luce Irigaray, it is precisely this difference in how the subject relates to subjects and objects in the external world which is fundamental in the formation of the sexuate subject, and how that masculine or feminine subject speaks and thinks. For her, this causes a fundamental impasse between men and women as two subjects who are different. My main point here, therefore, is that our understanding of the relationship between the internal and the external world, and how we perceive and interpret ourselves in relation to each other on that

field of the internal and the external, is crucial in forming ourselves as a subject among other subjects.

On the one hand, I have shown that for Luce Irigaray, the subject understood as neutral and non-sexuate is a fundamental motor in the objectification of women and men, and our descent into a nihilistic self-understanding. Whereas in Nishitani Keiji's work, we see almost no recognition of sexuate difference and the role which it plays in alienation and nihilism. For him, men (and women?) suffer from alienation and nihilism. Nishitani Keiji's analysis, therefore, runs the risk of being too abstract, and he uses neutral language which overlooks the dynamic which sexuate difference plays in alienation.

On the other hand, even though I agree with Luce Irigaray, that men perpetuate the objectification of women through domination, while they themselves fall deeper into a nihilistic world which she expresses as nothingness. At the same time, we have seen that Luce Irigaray's thought fails to fully account for how sexuate difference as a fundamental difference between two subjects can be grounded non-essentially, and therefore, still risks falling into the alienation of the isolated subject when read alongside the insights of Nishitani Keiji. This is because, for Nishitani Keiji, a subject cannot be constituted on anything trivial or transient or permanent. A subject must be constituted on its home ground of mutually interpenetrative phenomena (which is paradoxically transient and permanent!) In light of *śūnyatā* therefore, I bring

sexuate difference under scrutiny from the perspective of Nishitani Keiji, in order to ensure its non-essential quality, which I believe Luce Irigaray is in fact looking for.

My basic starting position, which is based on joining together Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray's thought, is that men and women will experience alienation differently, according to whether they are formed as sexuate subjects in relation to other subjects and objects, and this must be taken into account whatever our solution to the problem of nihilism might be, because a solution such as *śūnyatā* might work for men, but merely perpetuate the domination, objectification and suffering of women. In short, both men and women suffer from alienation and nihilism, and the role sexuate difference plays in that suffering should be made apparent, if our solution to the problem is to be effective. It is from this position that I work towards holding sexuate difference and sunyata simultaneously.

By bringing these two philosophers of nihilism together, I show how we can better understand the state of alienation for both men and women and I argue that we must take into account both Luce Irigaray's and Nishitani Keiji's thought to comprehensively handle the problem from both sides. The dialogue created by this juxtaposition of Luce Irigaray with Nishitani Keiji on the shared critique of alienation and its cause in self-misunderstanding found in contemporary philosophy and culture, heightens our awareness of the role which sexuate difference plays in the alienation of the self, while establishing a

platform for further fruitful dialogue to be created between them. Moreover, it begins to layout the possibility of a self-understanding which is based simultaneously on *śūnyatā* and sexuate difference, and leads to the liberation of the self from alienation and its perpetuation.

Liberation, in the way which I use it, is a process from this state of objectification which I call alienation, towards a relational self-understanding of the self, based on the conjoining of Luce Irigaray's sexuate self and Nishitani Keiji's non-self. For Nishitani Keiji, a self-understanding based on the concept of *śūnyatā* overcomes this mistaken self-understanding which is based on the wrong conception of the divide between the internal and the external world. For him, a form of non-dualism (*śūnyatā*) is necessary. However, as we saw, it is precisely in this relationship between the internal and the external world where Luce Irigaray perceives a fundamental difference between the formation of the sexuate subject. For this to be possible, a form of dualism is necessary because Luce Irigaray wants to establish the sexuate subject according to the different ways the subject and object are related to. This difference in formation means she can develop a philosophy of sexuate difference between two subjects who are different, and it is through the fundamental duality of human existence that she can offer a pathway for the liberation of the self from alienation and nihilism.

The problem which arises here of course, is the problem of how exactly we are to understand this sexuate difference, without it being objective

(biological) or essential (based on an unchanging and substantial form.) I think that Luce Irigaray's thought is implicitly non-dual, or as has the possibility of being held within a non-dual framework, such as *śūnyatā*. She herself is dismissive of claims that her philosophy is essentialist, and she also has a poor understanding of non-duality as found in Eastern traditions. By drawing on Nishitani Keiji's thought therefore, I can supplement her own thought, and place it within a fuller understanding fo non-dualism.

Śūnyatā, as we have seen, helps us to understand the fundamental relational quality of all existence, therefore, making any claims of essentialism empty. If I can show that the sexuate self as I-he and I-she can still be understood on the field of *śūnyatā* as non-he and non-she, then we have a non-essential sexuate self-understanding available to us, as a process for liberation from the alienation and nihilism of contemporary culture. In fact, even the possibility of such a process, offers an open-ended pathway which gives life purpose. We engage in a process of self-understanding which means we keep growing and transforming throughout our lives, creating ourselves through mutual transformation. This is because of the necessary open-ended quality of *śūnyatā*, as an everchanging and interpenetrative relational understanding of self and world. This offers a way of creating meaning and value in our lives, thereby overcoming nihilism as both Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray understand it.

However, as I have shown throughout this thesis for Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray this path is not only philosophical. The presentation of their thought, along with my own, takes place through philosophical dialogue, critique and a unique style of writing, which works with the tradition of Western philosophy, in order to understand ourselves in the cultural position we find ourselves in an emerging global world, but this philosophy and writing is underpinned by Eastern practices. Nishitani Keiji is in fact, one of the first people to really engage in this philosophical dialogue from the position of other as a Japanese philosopher, but his thought is, as we saw, underpinned and heavily informed by his life time of Zen meditation practice. Luce Irigaray on the other hand, presents her own philosophy as a path of sexuate difference which is prior to any cultural difference. For her, sexuate difference is global and so it must be included in, or more strongly stated, given priority, in our emerging global dialogue. To do this, she engages in a dialogue between East and West which for her is mainly around the practices which can supplement her self-understanding, such as Yoga and Tantra. These practices are fundamental to her thought and writing. The kind of global philosophical dialogue between men and women which I set up between Nishitani Keiji and Luce Irigaray was one which necessitated the inclusion of Eastern bodily practices, just as my own ideas and thought is strongly informed by my own engagement with Eastern practices.

Feminist comparative philosophy is a discourse which engages in the dialogue between men and women and across cultural differences however, I suggest that its goal of liberation (which is essentially one based on the

hermeneutics of self-understanding) must be one which recognises the different sexuate states of alienation, and attempts to move out of them, and that it must also include bodily practices to directly experience one's self, i.e., an authentic self-experience, which are also appropriate for our sexuate difference. Or, at minimum, that within feminist comparative philosophy, there must at least be a pathway which offers this perspective, because the bodily experience cannot be excluded from the process of liberation. I have shown that Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji consider bodily practices essential for self-understanding, and I claimed that they have both had such experiences on a certain level and that these underpin and inform their respective philosophical developments. The role of the re-integration of ourselves into nature, through our bodies, was shown too be crucial to this.

I have claimed that liberation from alienation and nihilism cannot only be political or theoretical, it must be directly experienced in our body, and Eastern practices can help us on that journey, which then may inform our theory and our political organisation. This is, in short, my understanding of existential thought and practice. Combining philosophical hermeneutics, cross-cultural dialogue, dialogue between men and women and Eastern practices gives us a comprehensive pathway for such a liberation: a pathway that essentially returns us to ourselves. This again is clearly shared by Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji. The fundamental difference is the importance of sexuate difference as a bodily difference for Luce Irigaray. How sexuate difference affects the effects of the practices we engage in is important to be aware of and perhaps wary of, as well as the resulting shift in self-understanding of the liberated self as non-self.

The key point would once again be, that certain Eastern practices might erase sexuate difference in favour of a non-dual understanding of reality. What we need therefore, is a cautious approach to Eastern practices, which takes into account bodily differences between men and women as understood in Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexuate difference. Practices found in Tantra, Yoga and Zen, need to be scrutinised and not adopted blindly. The problem is, that we must practice them in order to do this. We cannot dismiss them without first trying them for a suitable period. This is a risky endeavour, especially for women as most of these traditions are embedded in the dominant masculine and often patriarchal culture, language and thought in which they are found.

Sexuation comes to light owing to the critical and philosophical work of Luce Irigaray. For her, it is foundational in the formation of a subject as a living subject who speaks from their body. At first, Luce Irigaray problematises woman as a subject who speaks, and then in her later work she goes on to think through the philosophical engagement between men and women as subjects who are fundamentally different. This difference provides the possibility of an ethics between two, man and woman, and it is through our bodies, as living breathing sexuate human beings that we can come to this self-understanding. Eastern practices are foundational to this return to the body and nature, as I have demonstrated. I have shown that for Luce Irigaray, this is not only a pathway for women to find a position as a speaking subject in a man's world. Sexuate difference, along with her meditations on the breath, provide a vehicle for the liberation of men and women from alienation, understood as an

objectified and neutral self-understanding which causes nihilism. The development of what Luce Irigaray calls an I-he and an I-she is based on the experience of one's self as a body, in nature, breathing and speaking, and who is sexuate from birth. This, for her, guarantees a relational understanding of the self, and, it is through her exposure to Yoga and Tantra that she was able to come to such a philosophical position between what she calls East and West.

But, as I have suggested, even the sexuate phase of self-understanding must be pushed further onto the field of non-duality. By bringing in the thought of Nishitani Keiji, I have shown that *śūnyatā* would transdescend, and therefore, *include* sexuation, guaranteeing a relational understanding of the self as non-he or non-she, i.e., as a mutually interpenetrative sexuate self-understanding entwined on a non-dual understanding of reality. This is because a non-dual understanding such as Nishitani Keiji's is a transdescendence, a going down through the body, and a return to the body, and our bodies are sexuately different. However, this insight into our relational self-existence comes about by passing down and through the (sexuate) body to a more complete self-understanding of our relational existence as a part of a greater whole or web of reality. But we always return right back to this (sexuate) body which is now transfigured through a direct experience of mutual interpenetration. I consider that this is what Luce Irigaray means by *entasis*, a transdescendence in the body and this world. And because it passes through the body, never leaving it (as Nishitani Keiji states clearly) it must also be sexuate on descent through and sexuate on return to the body.

Although I agree with Nishitani Keiji that the fundamental relational and interpenetrative nature of existence means that 'I' as a subject is a limited and restrictive self-understanding, which leads us towards a nihilistic global culture based on the separation of the internal and the external, or the self and the world as ego and other. The juxtaposition of his thought with Luce Irigaray, quickly brings to light the fundamental problem of *śūnyatā* and a non-dual field of the non-self: such a self-understanding is once again neutral, and perhaps risks masking the alienation of one's self as a living breathing speaking and sexuate bodily existence. This is because a non-self is once again a neutral non-self, and potentially an erasure of sexuate difference. It is for this reason I suggest the non-he and non-she as subject positions in bodily experience, speech and thought.

For the most part, Luce Irigaray has a poor understanding of non-duality, at least as expressed in her texts, and a more nuanced understanding of non-duality as it pertains to the self and the problem of nihilism, as found in Nishitani Keiji's thought, goes a long way towards remedying this. By placing sexuate difference within a broader framework of non-duality, we can paradoxically hold these two insights simultaneously, because they both exist right here in this world. They are a transdescendence through self-understanding and in the body, not a transcendence to some 'other' world, philosophical idea, or abstract reality.

What I have argued in this thesis, therefore, is that we need to include an understanding of sexuation (the fundamental duality of man and woman as two subjects who are different) in our understanding of sunyata (as a field of relational interpenetration of all things). The two of sexuate difference, is simultaneously the one of *śūnyatā*. Sexuation may prevent alienation, as well as remedy it to a certain level, but the I-he and the I-she must go a step further and become the non-he and the non-she, which I suggest offers a way of understanding ourselves as always sexuate, and always on the field of mutually interpenetrative existence, i.e., sunyata.

Finally, a true liberation from alienation and nihilism, is one where *śūnyatā* includes the sexuate difference of men and women, understandable as two subjects who are different, but who on the field of *śūnyatā* are absolutely intertwined with each other. Men and women live in the same world, but they perceive and interpret it differently, which creates at least two worlds or at least two cultures (masculine and feminine) depending on their collective relational positions on the field of non-duality. In other words, the non-he and the non-she provide two sexuated subject positions which are based on an understanding of reality as completely inter-relational, while at the same time, taking into consideration the fundamental difference specific to human existence (*ningen*) that men and women have specific differences which are also dependent on how they are configured on that field of *śūnyatā*.

By bringing together Luce Irigaray and Nishitani Keiji, I create a unique pathway for the liberation of the self as alienated, to the self understood as both sexuate (two) and *śūnyatā* (none/one) simultaneously. This offers the best of both worlds by giving a clear natural and living bodily being, which recognises the relational difference between men and women, while at the same time understanding that we live in a shared world of mutually interpenetrative existence that conjoins them. The problem of nihilism, therefore, is our problem, both I-he and I-she, and we have the potential for a liberated existence within *śūnyatā* together, as both non-she and non-he.

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